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The Temperamental Zone

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CHAPTER I.

WHY didn't Barbara come with you?"

Auriol Czarny hesitated with a second's dramatic effect as she let her cloak slip from her shoulders to the maid's hands. Her youthful, delicately made-up face expressed a comic and yet pathetic helplessness.

"She—what shall I say, Marcia—you haven't seen her in twelve years, have you?" she replied. "You couldn't possibly visualize the type of girl she has become. Marvelous dynamic nature compressed between convent life and the unfortunate conditions I have been compelled to live under. Glorious girl, forceful, vivid, but controlled. I envy her her poise and outlook. I feel a child beside her, Marcia, positively. She has been with me nine months now—ever since Ladislas passed on—and I feel so utterly enervated that I could fly from her; yet I have found my motherhood. I worship her even while she bores me to death. My dear, I feel exactly like a little humming bird who finds she has hatched a sea gull. Fancy!"

"Very curious." The corners of Marcia Lord's generous mouth turned up humorously as she surveyed her guest; the slender, flat-chested, boyish

figure that barely came to her own ample shoulders, the bobbed, dark hair like a Florentine page, the restless, shrewd eyes, the strange mingling of witchery and wiliness, the costume of black and gold satin, at once daring and becoming, even to the imprudence of the youthful gold turban with its one, extravagant, trailing black plume.

Motherhood was pitiful for such a personality, Marcia thought. Her sympathy swept in a wave toward the girl who had been the victim for years of her mother's indiscretions.

"I must see her, whether she wants me to or not," she said placidly but with decision. "I promised Paul that I would."

Auriol had turned instinctively to the ivory dressing table, dabbling among its toilet trifles. At the name she stopped short, her hand arrested with lip stick hovering uncertainly over her delicate lips. She frowned, her eyebrows too close together for unselfish beauty.

"Nice of him to evince an interest, even if it is secondhand. You see, Marcia, there's nothing now to prevent his coming over here to see his child. I was afraid that he might, after Ladislas died, or that he might want me to return to America with Barbara. But he never even wrote to me. I suppose

he thinks I am a little old woman." She dabbed at her lips musingly. "What does he look like?"

"About the same," said her friend slowly; "terribly interesting. Barbara and he correspond, don't they?"

"Intermittently. She wrote to him of her own volition from Santa Lucia when she was fifteen—for a horse, I think it was. I resented it, of course, but what could I do? He sent the horse to her, a perfect beauty for her to ride, and afterward I thought, if it amused her to hear from him, why not?"

"Would you rather we had dinner served up here on my balcony?" interposed Marcia. "I thought it would be more private."

"May I be perfectly frank? No, I hate it up here. I can look out on the bay from my own balconies any time I wish. I'm starved, Marcia, simply starved for lights and gayety and everything that goes with the golden fruits of the house of abundance. Take me down to one of those adorable little tables on the mezzanine where you can watch the dancers below and hear the Arabian musicians. I haven't been here for dinner since Ladislav died. He always loved it, and to-night I want to feel it all again. I feel half blinded like those people in salt mines, don't you know, who only face the sunlight once or twice a year. Is there any one else here from home that I used to know?"

Marcia caught the expression of the twisted, controlled face, striving to keep back an emotional outburst, and suddenly she put her arms around the other woman in a quick, friendly embrace.

"You poor little wayfarer," she said, patting the bobbed hair gently. "It hasn't been all *couleur de rose*, has it? Such a shame, Auriol. You had everything to lose and nothing to gain, and you threw it away like an old cloak."

"I've never been sorry, not for a single instant." Auriol's head flashed up in defiance as she dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief like a rose petal. "It was worth it. You can't imagine what Ladislav was like to me. He was the eternal lover, Marcia. He made every day the beginning of a new romance. And he glorified me, poor, erratic, insipid me, and somehow put our love into melody until he was acclaimed a genius. And you needn't pity me, Marcia, because it was absolutely conventional. We were married in Paris just as soon as I got my divorce."

"I wasn't even thinking of your divorce," Marcia returned good-humoredly; "only glad that you managed to extract happiness out of the arrangement. Most women don't. How did Barbara get along with her stepfather?"

"She tolerated him and he considered her the great, inescapable discord. They rarely saw each other. I would not defraud the child of her right to me during her vacations. We always had a month together once a year, St. Malo, Guernsey, Isola Bella, Asola—she has a passion for islands. And it wasn't at all easy for me, Marcia. She's not a bit like other girls."

"She's eighteen now, isn't she?"

"Yes, nineteen in April. Born under Taurus; terribly unsettled sign for a girl; right on the cusp, though; gives her a chance at Gemini. She seems like a child still to me, even though she is towering over me; like the Wellings, you know."

"Blond?" said Marcia.

"No, thank Heaven! Plenty of pigment there." Auriol ran nervous fingertips through her own abundant, dark locks, ruffling them out around her small head. "But she has her father's eyes, jade and amber mingled, heavy, black, upcurling lashes. Paul's eyes always belied his nature. You'd swear he was thrillingly intense just to look into them, and really—b-r-r!" She

shivered. "There's a black panther we saw on the steamer crossing from Tripoli once, snared in the Sahara, the image of Barbara. Made me think of Balzac's 'Passion in the Desert,' remember? It was so human looking. She has all of his control and inherited inhibitions, and the same queer substrata of untamed longing. I dread her reactions when men become the ultimate problem in her life."

Marcia waited before pursuing the subject until they had descended to the mezzanine floor of the hotel, and found a small table that delighted Auriol, perched on the outer rim of the balcony overlooking the *salle de danse*. When she had relaxed somewhat Marcia returned to her self-imposed task of sounding the depth of real feeling toward the girl, who happened to be the daughter of Paul Welling and Madame Ladislas Czarny.

"Supposing," she ventured, "Paul happened to see Barbara; it might make a great difference at this time to them both. Would you be willing for her to make the initial effort?"

"Why should I"—Auriol shrugged narrow shoulders, dallying over her entrée like a starved gourmet—"if he doesn't care enough about her to come here?"

Marcia studied the pretty, ease-loving face opposite her musingly for a moment or two, then dropped her depth bomb.

"He will never send for her voluntarily; not now. You have been so far removed from the world at large, Auriol, I don't suppose gossip has reached you of his engagement to Sonya Zhibel."

The fragment of truffled *paté* remained unnoticed on Auriol's plate as she raised startled, indignant eyes to her friend. Her fingers clenched tightly on the edge of the table.

"I didn't think you had heard," Marcia continued quietly. "It was very un-

expected to all of his friends. He has lived such a secluded sort of bachelor existence ever since you went away; closed up the Fifth Avenue house entirely and rented both estates at Lenox and Newport; just lived on at Lantern Hills and kept a small apartment on Park Avenue. He goes in for yachting and motor-boat racing."

"Just who is this woman?" Auriol demanded with a ring of shrillness in her tone, of repressed, injured sensibilities. "I doubt very much whether he is free to marry in New York. You know I got the divorce."

"Don't strut with me, my dear," Marcia said simply and kindly. "You got the divorce because Paul was kind enough to step aside and allow it. If he has the ghost of a chance at this late day of finding love for himself, you would be ungracious not to wish him Godspeed in the venture."

"But, Marcia, I wasn't thinking of myself"—plaintively—"I was only worried about Barbara."

"Of course Barbara is the loser to some extent. He has never mentioned his engagement to her in any of his letters?"

"Indeed not"—bitterly. "He's far too politic for that. And even if he had, she would not care one way or the other; probably would think, as you do, that he has a perfect right to live his life as he sees fit. Who is she, Marcia?"

"I don't know a thing about her or against her, except that she has lived in New York about two years, and seems a favorite with the new, artistic, society set there. She has a little house on West Twelfth Street just off the Avenue. You never see her at any big affair, but her name's on every first-night list, and her portrait is sought by every ultra magazine as its chief adornment. I've never seen her myself, but every man who has comes to life when you mention her name, no

matter how deep a conversational coma he may have fallen into. She's part Roumanian, part Spanish, a fascinating mingling. When you look at it impersonally, it is an amazing thing that a man like Paul Welling, conservative, cold-blooded, intolerant always of anything pertaining to the temperamental zone, would be swept into one of its magnetic eddies at his time of life, and react to its demands like any lesser clay."

"He's a fool at fifty." Auriol drew a deep breath as she lighted her cigarette at the black candle near her elbow. "I shall not permit it—for Barbara's sake. It is robbing her of her father's protection and interest when she needs both."

"You double on your own tracks like a racing hare, Auriol." Marcia smiled across at her keenly. "The truth is, you're wildly jealous of Paul after twelve years of this enchantingly romantic existence with your Polish violinist. You feel there were depths in his nature you failed to gauge. I'm sorry I told you. You can't stop it and, if you tried to, people would talk."

"Have I ever cared what they said of me?" Auriol smoked with a touch of picturesque abandon, cigarette tilted in one hand, chin uplifted, regaining her confidence as she mentally blazed a trail of action ahead of her. "I have no intention of returning myself. Why should I? I have my villa here at Mentone, my circle of friends who have stood by me through my exile. It is Barbara that I am thinking of. I shall not tell her one word of this because it might make her despise her father. But I think it is a propitious hour for her to pay him a long-deferred visit."

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed Marcia Lord, startled out of her accustomed calm by the adroitness of the attack. "I wouldn't send her to him now, and especially without warning her."

"Wouldn't you?" Auriol's smile

deepened with enigmatic contentment. "I would. I know the one thing to combat Paul Welling's will, the one thing stronger than his own—his daughter's. Certainly I shall let her go. She can return with you next week, a delightful surprise for them both. Let her go into the race unhandicapped, Marcia. Don't you even tell her. I ask you not to. He deserves it for neglecting her all these years. And don't worry; she'll go willingly enough. She hates my mode of living, gypsying hither and yon as the mood seizes me. I will write to Paul myself, tell him my health is not good, that Barbara longs to see him, and I am willing for her to go to him for a year. It is very simple."

"Simple?" Marcia's clear gray eyes gazed at the vivid, willful face opposite her. "You balance the supposed rights of Barbara against her father's right to his own happiness. I don't like it, Auriol. I haven't seen this woman, but I felt relieved when I heard that Paul had found some one he could care for after all these years of disillusion. He's been a very lonely man. I'm sorry you feel resentful over it."

"Oh, but I'm not one bit. Put me absolutely aside. I haven't been a good mother to Bab. Perhaps I never should have had a child, anyway. She's always seemed a sort of experiment to me ever since she was born. So I don't want her to lose out on her father, too, don't you see? Paul has meant so much more to her than I have. She looks forward to meeting and knowing him. Can't you see that I must not let him get entangled with some impossible woman just when Bab needs him most. I'm in no position to give her the social chance she should have. Let him take her and open up his town house and get his sister Stephanie to sponsor her. Stephanie dislikes me. She'd love to take my place with my daughter. It's Bab's right and I'm going to see that she gets it."

"Let me meet Bab myself," said Marcia after a pause. "I think this problem is up to her. If she's like Paul at all, she'll give him the right of way in spite of you, my dear." She smiled over at the flushed, angry face of Madame Czarny. "For dessert, let's see, *plombière* or *sabalone*? Mentone is quaint with its mingling of the French and Italian, isn't it?"

Auriol turned her head away indifferently, eyes half closed. Sonya Zhibel. The name haunted her memory like a strain of forgotten music. She had lived twelve years in Europe on the uncertain outer rim of Continental society that accepted her for the sake of Czarny's genius. Somewhere along the spangled way she felt she had encountered that name, Sonya Zhibel. And suddenly a suggestion came to her. Savonich would know. She smiled back at Marcia Lord over a half-averted shoulder.

"Nothing sweet, thanks. *Café diable*. They make it wonderfully here."

CHAPTER II.

The Villa Floresca perched confidently among its terraced gardens above the winding cliff road. Below, the Baie de l'Ouest outspread in continual, ever-changing beauty of hue and mood. Mentone rambled picturesquely along its curving shore line, the varicolored buildings a mosaic of brilliantly gleaming beauty in the late afternoon sunlight.

At the curve of the long hill climb Barbara paused to rest at a favorite seat on the crumbling, frescoed wall of a deserted villa. Dandolo, her sleek Russian wolfhound, with eyes like filberts and the mien of Mazzini, hesitated, nosed at her wistfully, and slipped over the low wall past the thick, unclipped hedge where gnarled carob trees linked friendly boughs with lemon and orange aristocrats of the old days of culture.

Barbara swept off her black velvet tam, shook her hair free to the sea breeze, and relaxed after the long, tiresome walk to the post office. There had been no letter for her from New York. It was four weeks since her father had written to her, and then merely a brief note saying he was bound for a cruise down through the Antilles; back around the first of March. She felt hurt, thrown back on herself in poignant loneliness, envying him fiercely his leisure and freedom from all monetary annoyances. She wondered just how much of the truth he ever suspected of her own financial position. He was generous with her, yes, but did he imagine for one moment that she used it for herself? Involuntarily her eyes sought the gayly tiled roof of the villa beyond her, rose red against its mountain background. Almost she hated it and all that it symbolized in her present inclosed, suppressed existence.

Not that it had been so bad since Czarny died. Just as it had been possible afterward to throw wide the long French windows he had always closed against the sunlight, so it had seemed as if everything about the place had regained its strength and vigor. Not to come across him wandering aimlessly about the gardens or shadowed rooms, to see his pale, somber face with its great eyes of restless fires, his heavy, black, lusterless hair framing it, a sudden apparition in the gloom of the upper halls; all this was a relief that left her unnerved and half hysterical with thankfulness.

Nine months only. She had been secretly surprised at her mother removing every evidence of his recent presence among them. His favorite Cremona had been sold to a Parisian collector, bringing a sum that paid for Auriol's lavish funeral rites and æsthetic mourning. Everything she wore must be dead white like an Arab widow, she had said passionately. Ladislas

would have had it so. He always ignored her when she wore black. One might have passed now through the Villa Floresca from room to room and never guessed it had ever been the abode of the erratic and brilliant composer, Ladislav Czarny.

But Auriol had not eradicated his intimates, possibly because it was a special diet prescribed personally to feed her own vanity, this posing before a selective group as the one woman who had been the inspiration of his life and genius. They were welcome at the villa as they had been in his lifetime, a little artistic court fostered by Auriol, and held together by her reckless largesse and hospitality.

It would be the tea hour on the upper terrace now, Barbara thought with a little inward cynicism which seemed to be growing with her. Avessano and his sallow wife would be there; old Colonel Pitou, who would refuse tea and drink cognac, telling of his exploits and eying Auriol for constant encouragement. Probably the Vatellis, too, Pipino and Costanza. It was time they borrowed for their rent again. Pipino would demand dramatically his right as Czarny's friend to paint his marvelous wife, to give to the world the face that was the star of his dreams, his inspiration, his Fornarina. And having beguiled Auriol into a complaisant mood of gratified vanity, he would borrow from her out of Barbara's last allowance from her father.

Last of all, there would be Savonich, the big, blond violinist whom Czarny had picked up on a wandering tour through the readjusted Balkans. She liked him least of all, with his heavy, drooping head, his massive shoulders, and overlong arms. There was a strange, colorless character to his whole appearance that repelled her; his dead-white skin and pale, large hands, his light-blue eyes, moody, protruding under heavy lids. Most of all she disliked

him, she felt sure, yet vaguely, without definite reason. She dreaded the after-dinner hour when Auriol would beg him to play for them, and Savonich would contort his huge, stooped body about his violin, drawing out its restless, moaning music until Barbara would rise suddenly and leave the room against her mother's protest.

At times she felt a sickening revulsion against everything pertaining to this life that had been her portion for the past twelve years. She could remember vaguely flashes of another time, of a tall man who rumbled her curls laughingly and paused in corridors to watch her: her father. Of great, empty rooms she had peered into, with shrouded furniture and long mirrors, veiled chandeliers, of a curious sense of childish isolation in the midst of grandeur, of always losing her mother between brief moments of snatched caresses.

Then the sea; days and days of it with her mother secluded in her stateroom, and a new nurse who threatened to throw her overboard if she cried. She had been afraid even to fall asleep for fear this strange woman might drop her into the dark, rushing water. Later on, Paris, a suite of red and gold, music and laughter, her mother transformed into an exultant, joyous creature, and Czarny a new force to be reckoned with in their lives. She had missed her father most in those days until she had been taken away in care of a black-robed sister from the small, gray convent in Belgium.

For years after this life had been a curious patchwork of light and shade, intervals of excitement when Auriol, in a spasm of self-reproach, would take her away to some gay little resort and indulge in an orgy of righteous motherhood. Months at the gray convent would follow until, at thirteen, she had been switched to a girls' school near Arles, where she had gone through a

period of heartbroken regret, yearning for her favorite Sœur Bernadette and the little, cloistered garden with its doves and ways of peace.

Here the girls were older, more sophisticated. They moved in secretive little cliques, excluding newcomers from their intimacies. She was wretched and lonely. Here, too, for the first time, in a quarrel with Germaine Rigaud, daughter of a Parisian tenor, she heard her mother sneered at.

"Czarny, what could he do when she followed him here and demand that he marry her? Oh, but I have heard; I know all about it!"

Barbara had flung a bottle of ink at the slanderer in a frenzy of outraged pride, hitting her mark accurately, and had taken her diet of bread and water for a week with stoical satisfaction. But on her next visit to Auriol's latest establishment in Naples, she had regarded her stepfather in a new light. Evidently certain people considered him the victim. Hitherto she had always resented him as the direct cause of her own exile from America and from her own father. He had appeared to absorb her mother's love, to take her away from her. She observed him from a different angle. Her mother was intensely jealous of him. There were frequent quarrels, hysterical accusations, threats, then quite as passionate reunions. Barbara dreaded her enforced vacations spent in the curious ménages of the erratic pair. Once only she recalled Czarny turning on her with fiery-eyed denunciation.

"Have I not always before me the living image of him whom I hate, of his contemptuous disdain of me? Look at her, her eyes, her hair, her very expression. She is a tolerant, patient devil waiting for me to die so she may go back to him."

It had been merely part of his emotional mood of the moment, but she had wondered at his discernment. Her

mother had never shown enough interest in her thoughts to suspect her rebellion against their mode of living. Since Czarny's death this yearning to return to America, to see her father, had suddenly crystallized, had become a great, poignant urge in her life. It was ridiculous to think that her mother needed her, or loved her. Auriol's love of self kept her in a sphere of isolation from the world at large. She had no other interests.

She was startled by the growling of Dandolo in the shrubbery of the garden behind her. Calling to the dog, she rose, waiting for it to join her. Instead, the thick hedge was thrust aside as Michel Savonich shouldered his way through. He smiled down at her, the broad, close-lipped, intimate smile she detested.

"Dandolo joined us on the terrace, betraying you. Your mother wants you."

"I don't want any tea," Barbara replied briefly. "Tell her I have letters to write."

"There is an American woman with her to-day." Savonich ignored her manner and words completely. "A Mrs. Lord, middle-aged, blonde, widow of a diplomat, wears black and white, dominant major strain. I could express her to you perfectly in B."

Her eyes regarded him in serene disbelief. Her mother never had any American friends as guests.

"The same one she dined with Friday at Trentini's." His head was habitually lowered until, in glancing up, the white of his eyes showed beneath the iris, giving him a peculiarly furtive expression which she dreaded. "They have been discussing you."

Barbara passed him quickly, taking the shorter route to the villa through the gardens of its deserted neighbor. It never occurred to her to avoid a walk through the secluded, ilex-bordered walks with Savonich. She dis-

liked him, but would have scorned any idea of fearing him. Her thoughts raced ahead to this American friend of her mother's, Marcia Lord. Auriol had mentioned her carelessly on her return from the dinner, had rather avoided discussing her, it seemed. It must be some one out of the lost years who had known her father, had even seen him recently. Her heart beat fast with quickened longing as she hurried after the gliding figure of Dandolo ahead of them.

A break came in the formal plan of the old garden, a sunken fountain with a faun upholding a captured nymph. The encircled space was flooded with a deep, roseate glow. She stooped to drink from the cool, moss-rimmed stone, and suddenly, without warning, she felt Savonich's two hands on her head, caressing her hair. She shook off his touch instantly, rising with angry eyes.

"Don't," she said curtly. "You know how I hate anything like that."

"I know." He smiled back at her. "I commit lese majesty if I so much as lay my finger on your shadow. But I reach you with my music and you cannot get away from me there. Tonight I will play before this American who has come to take you back with her, and I will reveal you to yourself until you are shocked and frightened and enthralled at the woman of fire I will show you."

She heard only one phrase and seized it eagerly.

"Michel, are you sure that she has come to take me back with her? Oh, if I could! I hate it here!"

"Here?" He laughed at her as she passed on ahead of him along the path-way to the terraces. "What is here, or there? I tell you, that which you seek escape from is everywhere. It is the magic circle, the enchanted ring, the temperamental zone that draws into its spell those who can hear and under-

stand its meaning. You think by leaving this and going to America you will find—what? Peace of mind, security, relief from the divine restlessness of your heart?"

She heard him with close lips, and a resentment that would have brushed him out of her life like an annoying insect, one of the great, languorous moths that fluttered blindly to the light at night and blundered into death. They had reached the boundary between the two gardens, a high, clipped hedge of ilex. Voices drifted to them from the upper terrace. One slightly clearer than the rest reached her, a serene, sane voice saying:

"We sail the twentieth, if Barbara can be ready by then."

She hesitated at the green archway of the hedge, a sensation of happiness sweeping over her, of release, as if the voice had set free something within her soul that had been imprisoned. Savonich appeared at the turn of the path, and she hurried on ahead of him to join the group on the upper terrace.

CHAPTER III.

Marcia Lord was spending the night at the villa. Barbara had felt an instinctive liking for her the moment she laid her hand in the other's cool palm and heard her speak of her father.

It had been easy to sit slightly apart together on the terrace and talk in undertones while the rest had tea. Pipino was in a declamatory mood. Mounted on a stone urn, he spouted rapturously.

"I am the eternal Pierrot. You will find me in every land, the spirit of revel, of high carnival, the unquenchable flair for youth and adventure in the heart of Everyman. I give you a toast, Madame Czarny, Auriol, name of melody. To the fleeting moment, the eternal Now! Ah, to paint you in that mood." He half closed his eyes against

the light to catch the effect of shadow on Auriol's violet-clad figure. "Costanza, beloved, I ask you, is she not incomparable?"

"Don't listen to him," Barbara whispered abruptly, as Mrs. Lord watched him amusedly, summing up his worth. "He always does this. It is merely the prelude to a loan. Talk to me about my father. I'm starved to hear about him."

"I don't wonder that you are. He is the most delightful friend and companion, a man of finely balanced mind and great charm of manner, and very handsome. Oh, my dear, what more can I tell you?" Marcia laughed half regretfully. "I envy you your privilege of knowing him intimately. He is by far the most interesting and aloof man I have ever met."

"Will he care for me, I wonder?" Barbara asked anxiously. "I don't think he has any natural love for me or he'd have sent for me long ago." She glanced along the terrace to where Auriol had curled herself up in a deep-seated Roman chair, smoking lazily, absorbing the admiration and praise of her little court with the relaxed contentment of a petted kitten. "Perhaps he thinks I am like my mother," she added slowly. "I'm not. I can't imagine why she is willing to let me go now, at a moment's notice, when she has refused me over and over again. If I do go, and he happens to like me, do you suppose she would follow me?"

Marcia regarded the vivid, perplexed young face with compassion. There was no doubt that Barbara entertained no illusions regarding her mother's methods or tactics.

"Make it an understood point of fairness to you that she stays here," she advised. "Not that it could make any difference. He never mentions her name. They had drifted apart, you know, long before Czarny appeared."

"Had they?" A hurt expression stole

into Barbara's eyes, peculiar eyes, as her mother had described them, with long, upcurling, dark lashes revealing unexpectedly the strange, hazel-gold color of the iris.

"He made me promise to see you when I came to Mentone," Marcia continued.

"And bring me back with you?"

"Well, no"—honestly—"but it is an opportune time for you to go with me."

Barbara was silent. He had not sent for her, after all. Probably it had been arranged between her mother and Marcia Lord, to take her to New York and confront him with his responsibilities, so to speak. Her mother would use the occasion gayly to increase her allowance. She drew her breath in with a quick sigh as Colonel Pitou engaged in a hot argument with Savonich, a usual finale to the tea hour at the Villa Floresca.

"But what are you, sir? I challenge your nationality. Are you Roumanian, Russian, a Czech?"

"I am an internationalist," Savonich smiled back at him with baffling indolence. "I am of the world at large. That is beyond you, colonel, yes?"

"I will tell you what you are," thundered the colonel. "You are a Kalmuck, product of that No Man's Land so rank in treachery to the ideals of mankind that no nation even wants to claim its allegiance."

Savonich's left eyebrow raised slightly. He smoked imperturbably, tolerantly even, without pursuing the argument.

"Oh, tell me, what is a Kalmuck?" Auriol asked eagerly. "Colonel, you're so hectic; do count ten and take deep breaths."

"A Kalmuck," Savonich explained calmly, "is a cross between the Mongol and the Russian. He is almost correct. I am from the eastern Ukraine. By profession a violinist." He smiled at the colonel again with a contemptuous

good humor, and sauntered along the terrace to the house away from them.

Barbara drew a deep breath of relief as the party broke up, and she conducted Mrs. Lord to the airy, low-ceiled upper chamber reserved for special guests. The rose-stained stucco walls reflected the sunset's last glow. She moved a melon-shaped copper bowl filled with violets to the writing table by the window.

"Who is this musician, Savonich?" asked Marcia. "A protégé of her husband's, your mother told me, but he seems mysterious to me, or does he affect that pose?"

"He was a friend of Czarny's. I don't see how mother tolerates him now, but he lingers on, always telling us he is waiting for a summons somewhere. I think he is trying for concert work in England or America."

Auriol came up the narrow, circular staircase, humming to herself. She paused at their half-opened doorway to peer in.

"Isn't she beautiful, Marcia? I didn't exaggerate, did I? Those eyes, so unusual, aren't they? Have you told my darling how brave and generous I am going to be; stay way off here, a lonely little exile, and let her go to her father? A souvenir of an old love."

"But will you promise to remain here, mother?" Barbara asked coolly. "Or will *ma petite mamma* find the separation so unbearable that she must fly to join me?"

Auriol laughed, her head thrown back with a quick, wicked little move, her eyes half closed, her lips drawn in a close, secretive smile.

"I wonder. Of course, if you really needed me, my heart's treasure, nothing on earth could keep me from you." She caught the hurt expression of Barbara's face as she turned away to the window opening on the balcony. "It would be delicious, like a new Guitry one-act play! But no! I promise to

be good and stay in my rose-shrouded villa. Isn't she frightfully like Paul, Marcia? Just look at her when she's infuriated with her adorable, naughty mamma. It is the most subtle revenge I could take upon him, to send him this replica of himself. Here, beloved, take this." She twisted off the long, antique necklace she wore of topaz set deeply into long oblongs of hand-beaten gold, and dropped it carelessly over Barbara's dark head.

Marcia caught the look of resentful, silent pride in the girl's eyes as she received her mother's spasmodic embrace. The scene, she thought, was probably a keynote to the years preceding, to all the petty tragedy of Barbara's childhood. Later, during the evening, she saw how the element of the spectacular, in which Auriol luxuriated, annoyed the daughter's finer nature.

The dinner was a picturesque affair. The long refectory table with its crossed altar cloths of heavy, lace-bordered linen, the tall, flame-colored candles at either end in branched Roman candelabra of wrought iron, the bare, stucco walls with deep wall niches here and there, or recessed doorways draped in velvet, interested her. A green bronze head of Dante flanked by an incrustated, opalescent jar unearthed at Vesuvius, formed a background for Barbara's dark head. She wore a gown of dull gold velvet; her head was banded with a circlet of close gold leaves, that seemed to seize and enhance the glint of yellow in her eyes. Savonich's gaze never left her during the leisurely meal, even while he answered Auriol's incessant chatter or questioned Mrs. Lord about America.

Later in the evening, at Auriol's insistent urging, he played for them in the long, semidarkened room. Barbara had risen restlessly at her mother's petulant pleading, and had gone to one of the long windows opening on the terrace, the night breeze blowing back

her gown as if she had been in the prow of a boat. She lifted her face to it gratefully, her eyes closed.

Savonich was improvising, his heavy-shouldered figure seeming a part of the instrument in the half light as he bent over it, swayed by the music he invoked. Insistently it repeated the dominant strain over and over, a calling, yearning, threatening theme that rose in passionate cadences, and throbbed low into broken chords of hopelessness. Auriol lay back on the couch, smoking musingly. When he had finished and still stood in rapt abstraction, she said irrelevantly in her clear, metallic voice:

"Marcia, did you hear 'La Nuit Blanche' when you were in Paris? I'm dying to get Breval's hit out of it, 'Kiss me, Solange, and let me die.'"

Savonich's lips lifted in derisive contempt as he muttered something under his breath and left the room suddenly. Barbara came slowly back into the candle light's penumbra, a queer little smile on her lips.

"You irritate Michel terribly, mother, just when he is in a trance of triumphant agony. Did you like it, Mrs. Lord? His music is unpleasant to me, tortured, stagnant. I can't see how mother tolerates him."

"He'll never stay here once you have gone," Auriol flashed back at her. "You'd think I was the attraction, or that I retain Michel here against his will. Marcia, she makes me furious with that attitude of indifferent scorn about everything in my life, including my friends. A man of genius favors her with admiration. She sneers at him. Love, passion, all something to be denied and smothered, trampled to death. She is exactly like Paul."

Barbara stepped out through the open window to the moonlit terrace to escape the tirade, drew in a deep breath of relief, and walked to the low, broad steps leading to the lower garden. Dandolo rose from the threshold of the

high-arched entrance to follow after her. The perfume of sleeping flowers rose headily about her. A sea mist laid a silver glamour over the place, giving foliage and fountains a mystical, unreal beauty under the moon. She turned into the familiar walks eagerly, glad to be alone. It was a settled fact, her going within a week to America with Marcia Lord. She would see her father, strive to win his love and convince him that the past twelve years had never even touched her mentally or spiritually, that she slipped out of Auriol's chosen environment as easily as the girl in the old French fairy tale from the enchanted lizard skin.

Suddenly, without warning of sound or motion, Michel Savonich stood before her in the narrow, ilex-inclosed walk. He knelt before her, crushing her velvet gown to his face.

"Oh, how can you!" She said it between her teeth in swift repugnance, trying to draw free from the huge, white, clutching hands. "Let me go."

"Why?" His voice was harsh and guttural. "Do I injure you? May I not even kneel at your feet? I am not troubling you, am I?" He sat back on his heels like some brooding faun. "You hate emotion; that is it. You are magnificently above it. You are without temperamental weakness. I laugh at you, Barbara. You play half the scale of life, and think you achieve the great symphony."

"I am going back to the house," she said quietly. "Let me by."

"Go. I never asked you to stay. I am no fool. I worship the ideal of you in my own mind, not the half-developed woman creature that you are. You are self-confident, arrogant. But you are not cold. You are all fire within, I tell you. I could play what you are on my violin, and amaze you with the revelation of yourself. We have a saying in my land, 'the hour waits.' So I tell you now, who will not

let my arms or lips touch your sacred self, the hour waits for us both."

Barbara turned as she reached the terrace, her eyes brilliant with defiance, not of him so much as of whatever might lie behind his prophecy.

"Let it come. Michel, don't wish me anything but happiness. I've had a devil of a life over here. I don't want love. I hate your so-called temperamental affairs. I only want a sure footing under my feet in place of sands that shift with the tide."

"Still you cannot escape your own nature, and I shall follow you." He took her reluctant hands in his, detaining her. "I am not going to stay here without you. My summons has come also, and I obey it. You sail the twentieth? I will be at your heels like Dandolo by May."

She stared down at him with a strange fascination. In the misty moonlight his face took on a peculiar unreality; a greenish pallor seemed to overflow it with shadow fluidity, like moonlight on water. His half-opened eyes, overly large and protruding, gazed at her with passionate longing, but she felt neither anger nor resentment against him now, only an impersonal compassion that was vaguely tinged with horror, as if some phantasm of future menace had revealed to her the waiting hour when they would finally meet. How or when it would be she could not guess, but a strange prescience of fatality smote her.

Above them Auriol appeared in the long oblong of mellow light from the window, both hands parting the long curtains as she peered down into the garden.

"Bab, where are you? It's late," she called fretfully.

"In May." She caught Savonich's last whisper as she hurried up the terrace steps, her whole body chilled with an unknown dread. His touch remained like the dampness of the mist which clung about her velvet gown clammyly.

CHAPTER IV.

The following weeks were the most eventful Barbara had ever known. They gave her back her own spur to initiative, a quickened interest in life, and all the zest of to-morrow's possibilities.

In place of long, dreamy days of endless monotony at the Villa Floresca, a dweller for years on the threshold of the romantic, erratic pair, she found herself occupying the enviable position of Paul Welling's only daughter and heiress. Yet from the first moment of her meeting with her father she had been irritated by her own nameless disappointment. He was distinguished, delightfully companionable, all that Marcia Lord had pictured him, but he set up a certain barrier of reserve that disconcerted her.

They had entered New York harbor on a glowing, sun-drenched morning, with all the setting for a dramatic situation. She felt her very soul on tiptoe, yearning for the reunion after the years of separation, and found he had sent his secretary down to meet them. Mr. Welling was detained at a board meeting, he explained with eager courtesy. He had only received word of her expected arrival a few days previous. The town house would not be ready for a week. Mr. Welling suggested that she might like to remain with Mrs. Lord as her guest, or visit him at his apartment; or she could go out to her aunt's, Mrs. Orvis Blake's, on Long Island; just as she fancied.

Barbara turned to Mrs. Lord with a little smile that concealed her chagrin.

"I think I'd rather go directly to his own place, wherever that is. Good-by, Mrs. Lord; please don't desert me, will you?"

Steeled now against any emotional reaction, she went on with Reeves, the secretary, up to the Park Avenue apartment, feeling only curiosity over the ap-

proaching meeting. Her father would join her for luncheon there, Reeves informed her after a telephone consultation. She asked if she might speak to Mr. Welling herself.

"I'm terribly afraid not, Miss Welling," Reeves had stammered smilingly. "He's very particular about any one calling him from a conference. It's only about a two-hour wait. You'll excuse me, won't you? He wants me to come right down. Hakuro will give you anything you want. I've called up Mrs. Blake also, to let her know you've arrived, but she's at the dentist's. Fearful nuisance all around, isn't it?"

"I'm afraid I'm the fearful nuisance," Barbara had said laughingly. "Thank you, anyway."

After Reeves left her, she had strolled from room to room of the long, luxurious apartment, restless and curious, seeking the secret of Welling's personality from his chosen environment. What would he be like, this stranger who happened to be her father? Was her presence there an intrusion to him? She sat by the flat-topped mahogany desk, turning over some photographs of Palm Beach and the Antilles when her attention was arrested by a picture of a woman. She stood full length against a background of palms, her head half turned to the camera as if caught unawares. There was a compelling beauty and distinction about the shadowy figure and unusual face; something foreign, Barbara thought.

The opening of the vestibule door startled her from a long, searching reverie over the picture. She replaced it quickly, rising to meet her father halfway with a thrill of keenest expectancy. She gained her first impression of him as he entered the long room, his eyes seeking her. He was above usual height, with the spring and poise of perfect health and coördination. His dark hair waved back from a high forehead in clearly divided points at the

temples. She thought of old prints she had seen abroad, of Byron, Hamilton, Fersen, men who combined physical charm with isolation of spirit, who might turn from the love of woman with relief to cosmic contemplation, and find fulfillment of their dreams. The next instant, as he spoke, she could have laughed at her own girllike conception of him. His skin was deeply tanned, his eyes and features strikingly like her own.

"Hello, Bab," he called to her. "I'm mighty glad you came up here." Holding her hands fast after the first kiss, he looked at her musingly. Something he saw, or possibly missed, in her upturned face relieved him. He kissed her again. "Sorry I was detained. Was Reeves much of a bore? I told him to let your Aunt Stephanie know you had arrived. This place is not exactly suited to entertaining an unexpected daughter."

"I like it," Barbara returned with a touch of shyness in her manner toward him. "I would rather be with you alone at first."

Later when Hakuro announced luncheon they went down the long, wide hall together, and Welling stopped before a large, flat, black-rimmed Chinese mirror, his arm about her shoulders, scrutinizing the two reflections.

"Strong resemblance there, isn't there? How old are you, Bab?"

"Eighteen. Don't you even know when my birthday is?" Her eyes flashed a look of quick amusement at him.

"Certainly. You were born in the spring; April, wasn't it? You have a very good carriage, very remarkable coloring, and glorious eyes. Do you ride?"

"Yes. You sent me a horse when I was fifteen from your own stables."

"Did I?" he said absently, still regarding her in the mirror appreciatively. "Then you'll enjoy riding when we go

down to Lantern Hill. Better have a motor boat and a good car of your own, too. If you're like me, you'll prefer the country to town. Stephanie's promised to spend part of her time with us and see you through, and Marcia Lord's the best friend anybody could have, man or woman. To-night we're going to the opera. It's been years since a woman of our family has occupied the Welling box."

She had enjoyed that first evening with him to the utmost. Auriol had taken her frequently to the grand opera, both in London and Milan, but here she felt at home from the first instant she caught a glimpse of the brilliant panorama outspread before their grand-tier box. She found herself the focus of many lenses turned in their direction, but had no feeling of self-consciousness. Her gown of white and gold satin was cut severely plain. Welling's eyes watched her with keen pleasure. He would get his mother's jewels out of the vault to-morrow, he thought musingly. Oh, no, she was probably too young for diamonds. Armlets of beaten gold would have suited her; anything barbaric. In spite of her youth there was a vivid richness to her beauty that demanded a sumptuous setting. In repose he had discovered a weariness in her heavy-lidded, dark eyes that troubled him. He wondered if he had been too complaisant in permitting Auriol the full custody of his daughter.

Just before the curtain descended on the second act he left the box. Barbara had been so engrossed that she failed to notice his departure until the lights went up. For several minutes she waited, when she suddenly became aware of a group in a lower-tier box opposite, a woman and several men. She had half turned her back to the audience, but there was something arrestingly familiar to Barbara in the long, graceful line of sloping shoulder and arm, in the lithe, unstudied beauty

of her pose. As she gazed intently, she recognized her father sitting just back of the draperies, listening eagerly to this strange woman whom Barbara recognized as the original of the photograph which had so attracted her.

She made no comment when he rejoined her, nor did he offer any explanation for his absence, but she felt an odd current of thought between them, her mind seeking, questioning, his amused and evasive. He baffled her with an aloofness that matched her own. She found herself watching the figure in the lower box during the remainder of the opera, speculating, wondering just what this woman meant in her father's life and who she was. When it was over and she stood for a moment in the glare of light, it seemed to Barbara as if their glances met. Certainly, as she lingered, while one of the men placed a long cloak of ermine about her, she raised her head and looked directly at the Welling box. Thrilled at this unexpected, intangible encounter, Barbara followed her father, hoping to meet the woman on the lower foyer. But Welling made no attempt at haste, and by the time they reached the motor entrance she had disappeared.

The following day she lunched with her aunt, Mrs. Orvis Blake, a slight, gray-haired woman with the face of a French marquise of the *ancien régime*, who carried on a conversation by smiles. She was taken through the Welling town house at the northeast corner of Madison Avenue in the Thirties, a large, double, brownstone mansion with a conservatory spreading over the rear gardens.

"A gloomy place. Your grandmother came here a bride after the Civil War when this was considered shockingly uptown. Your mother hated it, and I never blamed her for that. You will enjoy Lantern Hill instead of this, but we will need it this fall when you make your *début*."

Barbara gazed about her with a yearning gladness. This was solid ground. Antiques so well chosen they could never go out of fashion, silver and paintings that thrilled her with their air of bygone splendor, mahogany dark as dregs of wine, deep toned in luster, mirrors that seemed to pose like Empire belles conscious of their own loveliness in unexpected corners.

"But I do like this, Aunt Stephanie," she said earnestly. "You don't know how good it seems after years of uncertainty to find oneself—well, where one belongs, don't you know?"

"Yes, I know quite well," Mrs. Blake answered quietly. "You were the child of a loveless, unfortunate marriage, Barbara, and I consider that Paul has been a delinquent father to you for years. He had a horror of your being like your mother. And now, of course, his coming marriage will separate you from him, but I shall try to make it up to you myself in every way I can."

Barbara flashed a look of startled amazement at her.

"His—what? I beg your pardon; I didn't understand."

"Marriage this fall. You knew, of course. I thought Marcia Lord had told you. My dear, don't stare at me like that. Every one knows he is going to marry Madame Zhibel."

"It just happens that I did not know, Aunt Stephanie," Barbara answered slowly. After all, why should she have been told? It would have complicated matters in her coming to America. Still, if Mrs. Lord had known, she must have told Auriol. And all at once the whole sinister, petty conspiracy against her father's right to happiness dawned upon her. She felt the old detestation and contempt for her mother's methods, of the intriguing, mischief-loving mind that would even make a cat's-paw out of her.

"It hardly seems fair to you, after all these years," Mrs. Blake began.

"Yes, it is. I am glad for him," Barbara exclaimed fervently. "Think of the years he has lost of love and companionship. I'm sure I saw her at the opera last night. She is very beautiful, isn't she?"

"Well, yes, a beautiful mystery." Her aunt sighed. "In a foreign style that I have never admired. Her hair is so golden it seems artificially touched up, and her eyes are extreme in their size and color, positively startling. She is not young, you know. I think she was a countess in her own country; some one told me, but I've forgotten where she came from. Paul never speaks of her to me, and it's not right at all. I should know her."

They had gone for a drive through the Park later in the afternoon in Mrs. Blake's favorite town limousine, a ponderous, heavily equipped car that seemed stuffy and uncomfortable to Barbara. A light haze of new green grass overspread the ground; newly cultivated beds of blooming tulips and crocuses made splashes of color here and there. She longed to be out in the open and alone. Dandolo had been brought over with her, and was chafing at the city confinement. She listened dreamily to her aunt, planning to escape with the dog into the Park for long, quiet walks, when her attention was caught by the strange movements of a car ahead of them. It seemed to be maneuvering on the curving driveway for a turn, then backed to the curb on the wrong side of the drive, as if waiting for something. The rest happened like lightning. She saw the figure of a young man step quickly into the roadway from a cross path. Instantly the waiting car shot forward like a leaping animal, bearing directly down upon him. Barbara leaned swiftly from the open side window beside her, calling out a warning to him. He sprang aside, but into the way of their own car, which swept him down. The other car put on

more speed and made the hill curve before its number could be seen.

"I used the emergency, madame," the chauffeur exclaimed as he swung to the pavement excitedly. "He jumped to miss the other car."

Other cars had halted about them. The form under the car lay motionless, face downward. Beatrice, following her aunt's example, stepped from the car to the ground, every nerve keyed to intensity. She had seen him so clearly in that one moment, tall and young, his head uplifted as he faced what seemed to be certain death. The police were arriving now. They lifted out the crumpled body and carried it over to the grass. She watched as they examined with quick deftness pulse, heart, eyes, each limb.

"He's all right; shock and bruised up a bit, that's all," she heard the officer saying.

Her aunt offered to take him to the nearest hospital; gave her own name; acted with perfect composure and dignity all the while that Barbara's thoughts raced. His hair was close cut, crisping in tight ripples of gold to his head. Lashes and brows were dark, the face full of lean, strong, young virility. His teeth were clenched, the lips drawn back, as if in one last thought of resentment when he had realized the imminent danger. Suddenly his eyes opened widely, surveyed the half circle of strange faces bending over him, looked over their heads to the grassy elevation where she stood, and met her own gaze fixed upon him. A puzzled expression came into his; he shut his eyes, opened them again, and still found her there, a reality against the spring foliage. Instinctively she smiled to give him courage, a quick, welcoming smile that drew him back to full consciousness, and he returned it, still with the puzzled surprise in his expression.

"If he's not badly injured, I will take him home myself in my own car," Mrs.

Blake said solicitously. "Can he stand?"

Aided by the officer's arm, he rose to his feet, dead white, teeth set against pain, but self-possessed. He ignored the curiosity of the lingering crowd, turning to Mrs. Blake.

"I'm quite all right, thanks; not at all hurt. If I could have a taxi, please."

"I could not allow it," she said with authority. "Help him in. Give the officer your name and address."

"I would prefer not to." Barbara bit her lip, delighting in his manner toward her aunt and the two policemen. "I am not injured. I haven't the slightest intention of annoying this lady with any claims for damages, and I don't want any publicity."

"But I wish to know your name, personally." Mrs. Blake spoke with a quiet courtesy that disarmed him. "Would you mind?"

He looked from her to Barbara, and again the two smiled at each other without reason. It was like a smile of mutual recognition, as if they had known one another long before this chance encounter.

"Pedro Girard," he said briefly, and took his place after them in the car, giving Somerset Chambers as his address.

This appeared to place him socially in Mrs. Blake's mind. During the drive she engaged him in conversation, while Barbara looked out of the open window, her heart beating faster as she listened. The air was charged with spring's challenge. All the while he was answering her aunt she felt his steady gaze on her face. He was too punctilious for an American, and yet not distant enough to be British. Mrs. Blake probed delicately for information concerning him.

"It was most peculiar, but it appeared to me as if that car bore down upon you deliberately. Of course it couldn't be so, but it looked that way, didn't it,

Barbara? My niece, Miss Welling, Mr. Girard."

She felt herself flushing as she met his eyes and his look of appealing interest.

"I am sure they made no attempt, anyway, to avoid you," she said. He was somewhere around twenty-four, she thought. His eyes were boyish, his lips and chin set with an established character of their own, firm and aggressive. There was nothing particularly distinctive about his appearance, the gray sack suit and soft walking hat, but she was keenly aware of an intense interest in him, more than she had ever known before for any man.

The car stopped before a building in the Sixties near Park Avenue. She noticed the discreet black and silver announcement above the arched doors: "Somerset Chambers." As he stepped from the car and paused to thank Mrs. Blake, she was struck by the touch of ceremonious courtesy in his manner, almost a royal reticence.

"I wish you would let me know tomorrow, if you are positively unhurt," her aunt said. "Suppose you drop in for tea about five. I can't have you on my conscience, because I have never run down anybody before."

"And I shall be so glad to come," he said simply, gazing at Barbara's averted face. "I thank you both."

Again the quick smile that flashed between them of intimate, long memory, and the car turned back uptown.

"An interesting young man," Mrs. Blake remarked musingly. "Pedro Girard. Do you think I was hasty in my invitation, Barbara? That signet ring he wears has value and verity, and his manner is marvelous. I shall ask Marcia Lord about him?"

"How would she know?"

Mrs. Blake studied a card which Girard had given her.

"His business address is Lord, Estes & Lord. Marcia constitutes two thirds

2—Ains.

of the firm now that her husband and father have gone."

Barbara hardly heard her. Leaning far back, she watched the settling afterglow with brooding, happy eyes, a strange disturbance through her whole being. For the first time in her life she felt self-conscious, embarrassed, as if she had still been subjected to the gaze of those eager, compelling eyes opposite. Her aunt left her at the apartment with the promise to remain with her in town for two months at least as soon as the house was ready. Once she was alone, she hurried to the telephone and called Mrs. Lord, impatient for any word concerning him. She made her inquiry as impersonal as possible. Her aunt wished to know, she said, because of the accident.

"Pedro Girard?" repeated Marcia. "Surely I know him. The most mysterious person I do know. I'm warning you right now, Bab, to keep away from him. He's delightful; he's irresistible; he's absolutely reckless about having his own way; and he's dangerous. I can't imagine what wild luck threw you two together."

"Divine luck," Barbara laughed back. "He's coming for tea to-morrow at Aunt Stephanie's special invitation. Can't you come too, please? I shall need you. At the Ambassador at five."

"I'll come, but I wash my hands of any consequences," Marcia said flatly. "You're not in love with Pedro, are you?"

"Impossible to diagnose at this early stage," Barbara said softly, "but I have terribly alarming symptoms. Be sure to come."

She hung up the receiver as Dandolo pawed for his usual petting at her knee, and smoothed back his silken ears half roughly.

"Pedro Girard, do you hear?" she whispered. "That's his name, Dandolo. Don't tell anybody, will you, but don't forget it: Pedro Girard."

CHAPTER V.

The atmosphere of the tea room was exotic and enervating, Barbara thought, as she followed Mrs. Blake to a reserved table the following afternoon. The decorations had been copied from the throne room of the royal palace in Siam. Gray apes and golden peacocks alternated along the deep frieze. Silver-scaled goddesses gazed down with eyes heavy with languorous ennui from midnight-blue panels, their heads drooping under the weight of enormous pagoda-shaped crowns of gold. The air was close and heavy with many blended perfumes.

"I wish, instead of opening up that ridiculous white elephant of a house, Paul had let you come here with me," Mrs. Blake remarked reflectively. "I always retain my suite here the year round. Still, we'll go to Lantern Hill in May. What did your father think of the accident yesterday?"

"I don't think he even heard me while I told about it. He has a perpetual smile that answers everything." Barbara's tone was careless, but the color rose in her cheeks as she recognized the figure making for their table. She permitted her aunt to carry on most of the conversation until Marcia Lord arrived and several others.

"Know him?" Marcia smiled back amusedly at the handsome youngster. "Pedro, just how well do I know you? He's the son of Tom's best friend abroad. They have both passed on, so I keep a weather eye on this wastrel. I am sure he allowed himself to be deliberately run down in order to achieve—this."

Barbara caught snatches of their conversation, but found herself strangely silent and half shy. He turned to her at length with eager relief as Marcia gave her attention to the others.

"You've just returned from Europe. Aren't you glad to leave it behind you?"

"Very glad." She avoided the fire in his eyes. "I've been trying to guess where you are from? You're not English, nor French. And I'm sure you're not Italian, but your first name is Spanish."

"My first name is Peter really," he said quietly, a shadow of austerity on his face. "As a matter of fact, I have no country now, so it makes no difference where I came from. The wings of war trailed over my land and obliterated it."

"In the Balkans?" she hazarded, remembering that Tom Lord had been ambassador to Greece. The fiery little Balkans had been his pet interest for years.

"But not of them," he returned emphatically; "not as they are to-day, a squabbling, routed pack of timeservers. I like your America better. You here, at least, are independent of the rest of the world."

"No country can be that," Barbara said quickly. "To sit apart in safety and watch Armageddon as if it were some spectacle staged for our amusement! Don't you care at all about the suffering of your country?"

"They have bought security," he answered slowly. "I saw my beloved father assassinated when I was a boy of twelve by the men he had raised to power and trusted. And I feel already a thousand years old. I don't think I am a coward but I have longed to find a land where men do not kill and betray each other. The old ideals of kingship fade into outgrown pageantry before the new dawn. I don't want to talk abstract generalities. I want to talk of you. Are you going to stay here?"

"For a while; I am not sure how long. But"—she hesitated—"I am very lonely already, because I am a stranger in my own country, I suppose. I would like you to meet my father." She paused.

"I'll build me a willow cabin by thy

door," he said half laughingly, but with pleading eyes. "I don't want to let you out of my sight for fear you'll vanish. You know, just in that one instant before I was struck on the drive, I turned my head and saw your face looking at me out of the car window. It was your cry that warned me."

"It seemed as if they were trying to run you down."

"Doubtless they were," he replied carelessly. "It's a little world, easy to reach around. When shall I see you again?"

"I brought my dog across with me: Dandolo. He's wild for a real run." The spirit of adventure caught her fancy. "Perhaps to-morrow at five he would be interested in the Park." She raised her lashes for one revealing glance, surprising a frown that lifted three tiny arcs in the center of his forehead.

"I will be frank with you, even though you care to think me a coward. It would be dangerous for you to be in my company in a public thoroughfare. For myself alone, I ignore it, but it would not be safe for you to be with me. Let me come to see you in your home, or out at Lantern Hill. I just overheard Mrs. Blake say you will go there in a few weeks."

She met his eyes now without embarrassment, her own filled with wondering conjecture.

"I wish you would tell me everything. That car did try to run you down deliberately?"

Mrs. Blake and Marcia were rising. There was no time for further confidence. She gave him her hand impulsively.

"I'm not at all afraid, and I will walk to-morrow at five with you in the Park. You will call for me, please, at the Warwick on Park Avenue. I'm stopping there with my father temporarily. Good-by."

He turned away abruptly after they

had gone, crossed the long lobby beyond the tea room, and entered an elevator. At the tenth floor he passed down the corridor to the private suite of Monsieur Antoine Bibet, *maitre d'hôtel*, and entered it with a private pass-key. In the black-and-gold living room one Chinese porcelain lamp on a reading desk furnished illumination. A large sepia etching of Notre Dame against a sunset sky occupied the wall space behind the desk; a red cardinal by Vibert in a gilt, deep frame made a brilliant touch of color in a dim corner. There was a racing horde of Tartars by Munkacsy above the plain white mantel, flanked by fencing foils and one slender scimitar with Arabic characters along its two-edged blade. Bookcases lined two sides of the room, filled mostly with foreign publications jumbled together. At the sound of his footstep on the polished, bare floor, Bibet's voice saluted him from the bathroom cheerily.

"Take ease while I dress. What news?"

"My salary has been raised, and you may stop my allowance," Pedro returned. He lit a cigarette and sat on the broad, cushioned arm of the couch, hands plunged deep into his pockets, frowning at nothing in particular.

When Bibet entered presently he surveyed the boy with affectionate concern as he adjusted his black tie precisely. He was above usual height, still possessing the military figure of the eighties. His iron-gray pompadour was brushed back severely; his eyes challenged the passing hour to rob him of past spoils. His appearance was warlike, impressive, until one found the large, pale-blue eyes betraying benignity, sympathy, even ready to moisten with deep emotion at unexpected moments.

"I do not jest about such matters," he responded with dignity. "Women bungle great intentions. Mrs. Lord gives you a position in her banking es-

tablishment against my judgment. You have ample revenues from your father's American investments. It is *infra dig* for you to work by the time clock like other persons."

"Frightfully beneath my dignity to become an economic, self-supporting unit instead of a vagabond prince." Pedro regarded him whimsically. "I don't like to touch your royal money, Bibet. It is stained. Take it and build a college on the site of our ruined capitol to teach ethics and humanitarianism to the children of the men who murdered my father."

"You are too personal. First your God, then your country, lastly your family. You break faith with me, with those who look to you for hope over yonder. I work and slave for you for twelve years. Thalassa lies prone on her face in the dust for Turks and Allies to tread upon, but fate will shift the balance and then what?" Bibet drew himself up to his full height, his voice deep with solemn intent. "I have watched the play, I tell you. Already the Allies snarl and growl at each other over the adjustment of claims and power. Islam circles over their heads like a vulture, waiting for the bones of the slain after they have flown at each other's throats. Pedro, boy, history is one great, recurrent cycle, cause and effect, around and around. When the great nations tear at each other's vitals, then the trampled ones may draw breath and live again. Thalassa lies where ancient Thessaly was. In those mountains you find a breed of men who love liberty and peace. Do you think they have forgotten your father?"

"They killed him," Pedro returned laconically. "I do not admire racial emotionalism gone mad. You are two men, Bibet. One is the old court chamberlain, Count Antoine Bibet de Martigny, intriguing forever to put me in my father's place. The other"—he rose and swung one arm affectionately about

Bibet's shoulder—"is my best friend, grand old Antoine. You're rank with moldering notions, prowling around cellars of the past, but I wouldn't give you up, Bibet, for Thalassa's best to-day. You know a prince in exile is something rather comical now, picturesque but comic. You dangle visionary thrones under my nose when I intend to become an American citizen and marry here."

"Great, eternal, unseen powers, you cannot be so damned a fool after all we have done for you! It is this woman Lord——"

"It's no one but myself," laughed Pedro, "and that very peculiar and unexplainable influence, Bibet, which clips souls apart and sets them loose on this dark star for the fun of mating them up again. But you don't have to worry. What earthly right have I to ask any woman to be my wife when my life is liable to be snapped off any minute?"

Bibet's bushy eyebrows arched and drew sharply together.

"Again a threat?"

"Not this time, my Bibet; nothing tangible. Last Friday as I crossed the street from the bank, something struck my shoulder a glancing blow, a corner section of a girder. It was the noon hour; no construction work going on around. It fell out of the air, apparently. Clever, aren't they?"

"Did the porter live who sampled the case of wine sent you?"

"He's out of danger, but he thinks I tried to poison him," answered Pedro dubiously. "He'll be cautious about sampling the unexpected gifts of others after this. Bibet, tell me, who are the persons who are trying to kill me?"

Bibet spread large, deprecatory hands.

"All royal possibilities are in danger the world over. It is the hour of seething revolution. You will live to see what I can glimpse now. It will come to a death struggle before long, but I

tell you, and you may laugh at me for an old fox, the highest force of all is the human intellect in a conflict like this. What is it but a battle of wits? Recall the fable of the fox who, threatened by both the lion and the tiger, turned with craft the hate of each to each and escaped while they killed each other. So to-day the most highly organized intellect is found among us of the old régime. We have divine patience; we watch the hour, and wait while the revolutionary forces prey on each other. The Turks show bared teeth at the Allies and secretly reach out to Russia. The Russians feign sleep and are ready to pour down upon western Europe like the old Tartars. Your yellow men fret and strain at leashes like wild animals trained to kill their kind. They watch the death struggles of the mighty ones, and will be in at the killing to gorge their full. And your Christian nations hold council after council, trusting no man, shifting policies! Ah, Pedro, one requires patience, I tell you, to live it through."

"You've brought me up on this sort of talk." Pedro regarded the tip of a freshly lighted cigarette tranquilly. "I don't believe there's a damned word of truth in it, Bibet. I think it is the shadow of the Boyg scaring mankind. You know I think your royal theories are just grand old bunk. And I wouldn't go back to Thalassa—not for all your kindness to me. All I have to do is remember the face of my father as he lay there on the black-and-white marble floor. He loved it all and they killed him. Now they try to kill me over here. What high ideal of truth and justice can be back of any government whose first argument is bloodshed?"

"The torch fell from his hand. It is yours to carry on." Bibet flushed.

"I will live my own life," Pedro told him quietly. "I will not be handcuffed and bound by inherited errors. And I'll

tell you this now, Bibet, if it were not for this reaching menace over my life to-day, I would—find out something."

"You are in love." Bibet's gaze dwelt with suspicion on the supple, erect figure by the window. "I ask you the truth. It is my right when you threaten to jeopardize the entire hope of my life. Who is she?"

Pedro's mouth turned up at the corner in a little crooked, inscrutable smile as he rose to leave.

"Tell these royal eliminators, if you happen to lay your finger on any of them, that I don't give a damn for their throne. Tell them I'll swear off all claim to it I may have, abdicate, whatever they want me to do. Tell them to go back home and quit bothering me. I want to be free from a creeping death. They don't have to kill me to remove me. I know of nothing to-day so discreditable as kingship."

"You will dine with me here to-night?" Bibet besought him.

Pedro shook his head, glancing over one shoulder with a quick, boyish smile at the unhappy old figure by the window.

"She's so beautiful, Bibet; I can't tell you how beautiful; worth all the kingdoms in the world. Don't be angry with me. I'll tell you her name: Barbara Welling. Your precious secret committee tried to get me as I was crossing a drive in the Park yesterday. She saved my life by calling out to me, and—well, I've just had tea with her, and I shall see her to-morrow and the day after that."

Before Bibet could frame an answer the door closed after Peter Alexis, hereditary prince of Thalassa.

CHAPTER VI.

The following morning at eleven Barbara's new gray roadster stood at the curb before Marcia Lord's residence on upper Fifth Avenue.

"I know you rise early," she said,

confronting Marcia in the cool sitting room on the third floor. "This is like the boudoir of a Roman matron. Did you bring it over intact?"

"They didn't have boudoirs, my dear." Marcia smiled over at her serenely. "Why are you out calling at this hour? Sit on that couch. It came from Egypt; Alexandria, I think. I imagine I am Hypatia when I recline on it. That sundial in the window is four thousand years old, and the window boxes are mummy cases. Looks like jasper, doesn't it?"

Barbara walked over to the windows overlooking the Park, held back the gold tissue curtain, and gazed out with a frown.

"I think I've come to you because you've got an understanding heart, and I feel as if you liked me——"

"Bab, I adore you, child. What do you want?" Marcia glanced at the troubled, lovely face anxiously. "Your mother isn't coming over?"

Barbara laughed.

"Not quite as bad as that. But Savonich sends me a sailing salutation." She tossed a card from her hand bag over to the couch. It was a photographic post card, a view of the three pyramids by moonlight. Beneath was written:

The hour waits. I sail to-day. Until then.

SAVONICH.

"Terribly emotional, isn't it?" Marcia handed it back amusedly. "What of it?"

"Oh, nothing." Barbara sighed restlessly, hesitated, and plunged into what she had come to say. "I don't want Savonich to come here and worry me. I am positive that I love your Pedro Girard."

"So you will act like your father. You love and desire, and reach out to seize your prize from the hands of the gods without biding their time. I knew yesterday that Pedro was fearfully attracted to you."

"Then why should he try to avoid me? Why should he tell me he cannot walk with me in the Park; that it is dangerous; that—oh, I don't know." She sat down suddenly on the low Roman seat before Marcia, clasping her hands about her knees. "Who is he? Please, please tell me!"

"It's not our secret," Marcia replied quietly. "And I know very little myself. My husband was a classmate of his father both at Oxford and the Sorbonne; political economy and international law. After his father's death he——"

"He said he was assassinated."

For a moment Mrs. Lord appeared confused, then continued:

"I believe he was. It was during the hectic opening days of the war. At rate, Pedro was brought to this country by Count Antoine de Martigny. Mr. Lord aided them in getting away safely. I have placed him in our foreign department at the bank, and he is making good."

"There's more than just that," Barbara said quickly. "Listen now. Aunt Stephanie and I ran him down in the Park, as I told you over the phone the other night. But I am positive the car just ahead of ours tried to run him down intentionally. As we came along the drive I saw it lingering along as if it were waiting for somebody. When he started to cross just where the walk from the Mall crosses the west drive, it was exactly as if some one had signaled to the driver, because the car shot forward suddenly and made full speed toward him. He tried to get out of its way as I called out to him, and fell under our car. I tried to get the number, but they were gone before we could give the alarm."

"It might have been accidental," Marcia said after a moment's thought. "I wonder if that is what he meant yesterday when I asked him how life was going along, and he laughed and said

he was still on the firing line. I can't blame you at all, Bab, but what about your father?"

"He's far too much engrossed in his own affairs to be troubled with mine," Barbara replied calmly. "Good-by. I have another call to make before luncheon."

She left with a laugh, refusing Marcia's invitation to remain, and turned the car downtown with a thrill of expectancy. Straight down to Twelfth Street she drove, and west a few doors until she stopped before a small, two-story dwelling, its deep, colonial doorway guarded by dwarf evergreen trees, and window boxes filled with yellow tulips like upturned chalices of gold.

A young Arabian admitted her, garbed in yellow silk and turbaned. At his feet, which were bare in embroidered slippers, a jet-black Chow stared at her. She felt vaguely irritated by the theatrical effect, although it was not at all like Auriol's chosen environment. Rather, as she entered the long, narrow reception room, she thought it was like the salon of some famous personage. She heard herself announced in a strange language, and stepped by the long, straight, velvet curtains into the dimly lighted room.

"Miss Welling?" A woman standing with her back to the doorway in conversation with a man, turned eagerly to greet her. She was taller than Barbara, very slender, very stately. Her hair, with its amazing, deep golden coloring, was piled high on her head, caught with a large, amber, Spanish comb that spread out fanwise. Her eyes were very large, of velvety blackness, foreign, appealing. Barbara thought she had never seen such perfect lips, delicately touched with carmine against the creamy whiteness of her skin, beautifully shaped, tired lips. She held the girl's hands in both her own tenderly. "It is so wonderful of you to come way down here to see me." Her voice was

rich in timber, compelling in its peculiar, winning charm. She turned to her other caller. "This is Count Antoine de Martigny, an old friend of mine from many, many years back."

Bibet drew himself up with much dignity and reserve after his formal bow, and passed out. So this was the marvelous Miss Welling, for whose sake Pedro was willing to toss a kingdom in the discard. He felt frightfully upset and annoyed already after an hour's interview with Sonya, an utterly fruitless interview on the most important thing in his whole life. She had heard him out in silence, and nodded dreamily just before Barbara's arrival.

"I will not interfere, my Bibet; not yet, at any rate. But I tell you now you are wrong. Nothing on the face of the earth matters but love, nothing! I would sacrifice anything to see Pedro find happiness."

She drew forward a deeply cushioned chair now for Barbara, and seated herself in the corner of the couch, banked high with richly embroidered cushions.

"Now we are alone together. You knew how greatly I longed to see you, did you not? Let me look at you. Ah, clear, unafraid eyes. I have not had my coffee yet, the count came so very early. He is absurd, is he not? Of the Bismarck period, yes?" She laughed merrily, and clapped her hands, gave the Arab boy an order in French, and smiled broodingly at her guest. "How old are you? I ask your father so many questions, and never, never he tells me one word about you. I discover that you are here in New York only two days ago, and I feel deeply hurt he has not even told me of your existence."

"Probably he thought we would hate each other," Barbara said with tranquil enjoyment over the success of her own personal coup. "I wanted to come at once, as soon as I learned he was to be married again."

Sonya Zhibel half closed her eyes,

a little, secretive smile drawing in the corners of her lips. She regarded the youthful face opposite her with a peculiar intentness, almost a yearning wistfulness.

"I wonder just exactly all you may have heard about me, and from whom?"

"Not from my father. His sister told me first, my aunt, Mrs. Orvis Blake. And from Mrs. Lord also. I don't believe that father feels really acquainted with me yet, we've been apart so long. He's like a stranger."

Sonya's eyes shut quickly in pain; her hands suddenly thrust out before her impetuously.

"There, you see?" she demanded passionately. "If it had not been for me, for the new love interest in his life, he would have adored you, his only child; he would have filled his whole days with the joy of finding you again. So it is right that I show him all that he is losing. Listen to me, my dear. Your father is the most interesting man whom I have ever known. I worship him; I respect him. He is the only man whom I have ever respected, I assure you. I know that your mother is impossible as a parent. You need him absolutely. I will not permit that your future happiness is jeopardized by an alliance with me. Youth is paramount. I myself"—her face saddened with a shadowing thought—"I speak as though I had a child. I would never stop one instant where sacrifice was required of me for its safety or well-being. I would give it my life unhesitatingly, without a second's thought."

"You're unfair," Barbara interposed eagerly. "Oh, Madame Zhibel, I would do anything to make reparation to my father for his years of loneliness. Please don't think for one moment of me——"

"No?" Sonya looked at her searchingly, subsiding among her cushions, only the brilliant high lights in her eyes betraying her agitation. "You are not in love?"

The directness of the question took Barbara's courage away. She flushed betrayingly, her head half drooping, furious at herself for lack of control.

"You see, I know much, my dear," Sonya said to her wisely, tenderly. "You are aware of love. And I tell you from the depths of my heart it is worth any sacrifice to possess the one great love. So many are passed by and never feel the silent blessing rest upon them. Do not permit it to escape." She sat up before the copper tray which the Arab placed before her on a low stand, and served the perfumed Turkish coffee in the tiny metal cups. "Meanwhile, for an hour we will drift in the happiness of finding each other. And I will expect you to return—oh, often, informally, like this, and we will talk together. Tell me who it is you love? Ah, now, don't be proud with me. You know you are wild to speak of him to some one. And I shall rejoice to hear." She smiled at the girl.

"But I have only known him a few days," Barbara demurred half laughingly. "How can I be sure?"

"You are, though," Sonya replied positively. "You are not the type to give your love like a susceptible school-girl. Tell me what he is like."

She closed her eyes, listening absorbedly over her elevated cup of coffee; and strangely enough, Barbara found herself describing, haltingly at first, with embarrassment, then with all the new passion of her heart in her low-pitched voice, Pedro Girard.

"He is about twenty-three or four, I think, but he is tall and athletic, and he is—really he is distinguished in his whole manner and bearing."

"Oh, I am sure of it!" Sonya exclaimed delightedly. "Go on, my beautiful one."

"He is from some country around the Balkans. I think it must be near Greece, because he looks like the old-time Greeks, he is so very fair; but his eyes

are dark and so are his lashes and brows. Why, they are like yours." She stopped in surprise, looking at the face before her.

"Doubtless. My mother was from that part of Europe. It is a prevalent type there." Sonya inhaled deeply from her thin, brown-wrapped cigarette. "Has he a good voice, good poise? Is he very handsome?"

"I think he's the best-looking man I have ever seen," Barbara said simply. "I can't bear foreigners as a rule, but he is a cosmopolite; you couldn't tell where he came from. His name is Peter Alexis Girard, Pedro for short."

"Pedro for short," Sonya repeated it lingeringly. "How delightful. I wish you both the uttermost port of happiness." The buzz of the electric bell came from the lower hall. Barbara rose to go, avoiding any early guests.

"But you will come again, very soon?" As they stood side by side, Barbara was not quite so tall as this slim silhouette of grace. Suddenly Sonya slipped from around her own throat a thin gold chain threaded with many pearls. On the end was a large, oblong gold case as if for cigarettes. She snapped it open, disclosing a miniature of herself inside.

"I know you will come to love me, and I wish you to have this," she said softly, with a grave, unusual dignity. "It was painted years ago for one I loved greatly, one who died." Her finger tips lingered on the slim, sloping shoulders. "I am so very proud that you should come to visit me of your own free will, that you care so deeply for your father's happiness. That is the secret of all great love. We never seek our own fulfillment. We live solely for those we love best. Come soon again, won't you?"

The last Barbara saw of her was the slender, dramatic figure standing in the velvet-curtained doorway, one arm lifted to wave her a farewell greeting.

CHAPTER VII.

At five she had met Pedro for an hour's stroll in the Park. They had chosen the more secluded paths along the eastern side. Dandolo was wild as a puppy over his liberation. He raced ahead of them, penetrating every thicket of shrubbery until a policeman ordered him leashed.

"What a shame," Barbara said. "I can't bear the city myself. We're going out to Lantern Hill, my father's Long Island place. I want you to come there and visit us. I love to ride, and drive a car, and I'm to have my own motor boat. It's no fun alone, and I hardly know anybody here yet."

"I shall come just as often as you will let me." They had paused at the top of a small hill. Its twisted walks led to a summerhouse overlooking the lake. She leaned on the rustic fence, avoiding his eyes. He went on: "Mrs. Lord warned you that it was dangerous to know me. I did myself, and still you put up with me."

"I'm rather lonesome, to tell the truth," she said. "I think I reach out to you instinctively because it is easy to talk to you, and I like to be with you."

Her complete lack of self-consciousness as she said this troubled him. He studied her face seriously until she felt his gaze, and turned to smile.

"I have been so very lonely all my life," she said. "If you knew, you would not blame me for trying to make sure of you as a friend. And, besides, you interest me. You know, this morning I called on Marcia Lord, and tried my best to make her tell me all she knew about you, and she wouldn't. Only that you were the son of Mr. Lord's closest European friend, and that he had aided your escape years ago. Why did you have to escape?"

He thought for a minute moodily, looking away from her eager, lovely

face to the black swans down in the lake, weighing many things in his own mind. After all, he thought, what could it matter if he told her? It was inevitable that she should know the truth sometime.

"Because I happen to belong to the ruling family of a small principality swept away, as I told you, during the war. My father was Prince Charles Alexis of Thalassa. He never dreamed of ruling. There were five ahead of him, and he spent his youth in study and traveling. He had invested heavily in American securities, I know, and kept up his friendship with Tom Lord. He never cared for kingship, refused the crown when it was offered him, and finally accepted because the war was imminent and he believed he might hold Thalassa steady while Greece was wavering. He was assassinated, as I told you. A man named Antoine de Martigny, who was court chamberlain, got me out of the country with Lord's assistance."

"But your mother!" Barbara said. "You haven't said one word about her."

"She was the Archduchess Anne Celeste of Austria," he said quietly. "She died at my birth. Count de Martigny and his wife really brought me up. He is here now in New York, my best friend next to Mrs. Lord. So you see why you were warned against me as a dangerous person. But I'm doing my best to outlive it all; truly I am." He looked down at her with the little, whimsical, irresistible smile she liked to see. "Do you think you can overlook the other, and consider me a prospective American citizen and business man?"

"What a shame it is that we have to consider anything," Barbara said quickly. "I mean all these absurd tangles of life's mistakes. I don't want even to think of it. You're Pedro Girard, and you're coming to see me often. I'm going to hurry our going out to Lantern Hill."

That evening after dinner she stopped Welling as he started to go upstairs.

"I'll only keep you a minute, dear."

He retraced his steps and joined her in the library, a long, restful room that occupied the south lower wing of the house. She turned on a shaded light by a deep-seated armchair, persuaded him into it, and seated herself on its broadly cushioned arm. There was a curious, compassionate look in her eyes, he thought, a new appeal in her manner toward himself. He looked at her with a great tenderness in his eyes. His heart had long since warmed to this lovely, clear-eyed young daughter of his.

"You know that you are a beautifully satisfying sight in that amber-colored gown, Bab. Going out?" He reached past her for a cigarette from the metal box on the table. She noticed how tense the muscles on his face seemed, the lean, finely featured, thoroughbred face she had grown to love.

"I dressed for you specially," she told him, suddenly laying one arm around his shoulders, and her cheek against his head. "Dear, I have called on Madame Zhibel to-day." He made no reply; lighted his cigarette leisurely; waited for her to continue. "I wanted you to know that I was not told anything when mother sent me here to you. I did not even know that you were to be married. This morning Aunt Stephanie told me; no, it was yesterday. So I wanted to know Madame Zhibel myself, and I went to see her. She was adorable to me, dad."

"Yes," he said quietly. "She would be."

"And I want to beg you to put all thought of me out of your mind, and go ahead just as if I had never come here. It is horrible when I think that I was probably sent just to trouble and embarrass you. I can see now why you have acted the way you have toward me."

"My dear girl, what do you mean?" he interposed. "I never dreamed of connecting you with any petty conspiracy your mother might have indulged in. There is nothing really wrong in it. It is a feminine move, and one must do her justice for knowing her sex. Sonya refused me this afternoon."

She stared at him in amazed disbelief.

"Oh, you don't think it was my going to see her?"

He drew her to him with reassuring tenderness.

"I'm sure it was not. In fact, she herself told me of your visit, and she loved you for it. There is something else. She is moody and capricious, impetuous, generous. But she swears it is not because I have a daughter who needs me." He smiled at her, but Barbara's eyes were stormy and rebellious with sudden reaction against Sonya, as she recalled what she had said.

"I don't believe her. She talked to me of sacrificing one's happiness for one's children. It makes me perfectly furious, as if I were some little, idiotic subdeb, waiting to be exploited socially, intriguing to cut you out of your right to happiness, trying to absorb all of your affection. It seems as if the world had turned upside down in its ideas. You older people are the children of to-day, and we of the new generation are given eyes to see beyond old barriers that you have set up around us. Now listen to me. I am not going to stay here in town with Aunt Stephanie to do a daily round of shopping and haunting dressmaker establishments. I don't give a rap for that sort of thing, dad. If I could, I would wear sport clothes forever. Let me go out to Lantern Hill and catch the spring there before it goes. I'd love it. I know that Mrs. Lord would go with me, if Aunt Stephanie objects. Please let me, and, please, while I'm out of the way, make her change her mind."

"You think—do you imagine she cares?" He spoke with an effort. It astonished him that he should find it possible to discuss this matter with Barbara. In a very short time she had grown as close to him as though he had always had her by him.

"She adores you. Don't let her escape. It's so easy, so amazingly easy, to hold a woman if she only loves you. Don't be aloof with her and strange when she's longing to have you convince her that all the daughters in the world could not fill the place of the one love."

He stared at her in quizzical surprise at her passionate vehemence. Unconsciously she was pleading her own cause.

"Did you leave any special interest behind you, Barbara, in Italy?" he asked.

"No one at all, dad," she assured him, with eyes as amused and inscrutable as his own could be. "May I really go out to Lantern Hill at once?"

"To-morrow. I'll go along to show you around and pick a good mount for you to ride. It's a great playground for bored nerves. I'll join you there week-ends."

Alone, after he had gone, Barbara hurried to call up Marcia Lord and ask her to go with her to Long Island.

"It's a cold-blooded conspiracy," Marcia said resignedly. "You may fool your father, but I see the entire affair ahead. I don't want to be blamed, my dear, if you take the danger curve at high speed and come a glorious cropper."

"But I won't," Barbara declared. "And my beloved father can't be bothered with me any longer because I've just started him off on a renewed romance. I'll tell you about it to-morrow. And Pedro Girard is coming to see me every chance he gets."

"I don't doubt it," Marcia sighed. "You've surely picked your setting

right, if you aimed to affect Pedro's imagination. He hates the city. I declare, it is the most premeditated plot, Bab. I don't know which I should try to save, you or Pedro. You're both of you irresponsible, temperamental adventurers after romance."

"Save him," Barbara laughed. "I can take care of myself. Be ready to-morrow surely, won't you?"

Later in the evening she wrote a long letter to her mother. She used no strategy with her, knowing the evasive, changeable mind she was dealing with. She told her that she had found out why she, Auriol, had permitted her to visit her father at this particular time, to embarrass him by her presence and check his marriage with Madame Sonya.

"I visited her to-day of my own free will," she wrote. "She is a very beautiful and charming woman, just the type who would attract and hold him. I have grown to love father, and I would gladly even return to Italy rather than stand in his way in this. You will hate me, I know, but you know, too, how I despise subterfuge and deceit. I want you to know exactly how I stand in this matter, and that I will do everything to help him."

After sealing it she wrote another note, merely a line on a correspondence card, and directed it to Pedro Girard, The Somerset.

Lantern Hill to-morrow. We expect you Saturday.
BARBARA WELLING.

At the same moment Pedro listened with a frown to Antoine Bibet, Count de Martigny, in the latter's apartment at the Ambassador.

"I have outwitted them always before, but now we must leave New York and lose ourselves before this man arrives. You have asked me who they were, these men who seek your life. I have private information both here and in Europe concerning their activities. You can remember your father's death,

you say. The man who fired the shot that killed him was Romain Savonich, a Russian whom he had trusted and raised to office. Savonich is dead now himself, but he has a son, a violinist, who has acted as a secret agent of the central committee for over a year in southern Europe. I have information to-day that this Michel Savonich sailed from Naples on the twenty-sixth for New York."

"Well, what of it? You think he is selected to"—Pedro hesitated, laughed, and finished—"eliminate me? You fret like an old grandmother over me, Bibet. Bring Savonich to me and let me talk with him."

"You are leaving New York at once," Bibet said positively. "I have made all arrangements. I will explain myself to Mrs. Lord. You will sail for South America to-morrow."

Pedro smiled the peculiarly winning, friendly smile that changed him from a somewhat reserved, austere young man to a boy.

"Sorry, Bibet," he said regretfully, "but you couldn't get me out of New York just at this particular time under any conditions. I'd hazard anything in life for the next six weeks to stay here. When you've located this Michel, let me know. I'll deal with him differently from your methods."

"You will not." Bibet stood at his full height, shoulders back, with a look of fiery exaltation on his old, deeply seamed face. "I swore to your father that I would place you on the throne of Thalassa and I keep faith with him still. When they are ready, I will be ready, too, to give you back to them."

"Grand old friend!" Pedro's smile left his face as he caught some of the old man's superb spirit. "A petty little kingdom swept out of existence by the stroke of a pen on a treaty, a bone to be bandied between Greek and Turk, and you guard the honor of its future with your life. Do you truly think, Bibet,

it matters whether I ever go back there, even if some upheaval did take place, and they wanted me, which I very much doubt will ever happen?"

"You are not to question. You are to be ready, that is all," Bibet returned austerely. The telephone bell rang on the desk. He answered it perfunctorily.

"Hello? Yes, this is Bibet himself speaking. What? Ah-h-h!" He gave an indrawn exclamation. "So? I have the same information. I—I cannot talk to you, madame, I have a guest; you understand me. Later I will call up." His face was deeper in color when he hung up, and turned to Pedro standing near by, regarding him quietly.

"Just whom were you speaking with then?" he asked deliberately.

Bibet hesitated, seeking plausible equivocation. Then suddenly he beamed with relief.

"One of my private foreign operatives. She informs me of Savonich's sailing from Naples, news which I already have from the other side."

Pedro eyed him keenly as he rose to leave.

"You're a rare old fox, Bibet. Don't engage any passage for me to South America, though. I'll see this through right here in New York."

CHAPTER VIII.

Mrs. Blake demurred strongly against the unseasonable move to Lantern Hill. It was only the first part of April, still unsettled weather, she argued. Six weeks in town would give Barbara a fairly good insight and schooling in New York ways, which she needed badly. And, personally, she said that she could not think of exposing her health to the changeableness of the sea air in the spring.

"I know you think I'm ungrateful and obstinate, Aunt Stephanie," Barbara told her, "but I can't bear the city, and spring sets me wild for open spaces and

freedom. Mrs. Lord will go out with me, and dad promises to spend his weekends."

"But he won't do anything of the kind."

"Perhaps not. Anyway, I want to ride and drive my car out there and play around. Dad says there are wonderful old-time house servants who live almost a pensioned life out there. I'm sure I will be perfectly safe."

"I'm not at all sure, but I'm helpless," Mrs. Blake smiled back. "Run along, dear, and, if it bores you, come and stay with me. I'll promise to have our interesting Pedro for tea."

"Dear of you." Barbara had given her a quick, unexpected embrace, and laughed to herself.

It was her own secret, she assured herself, the promise of Pedro to visit often at Lantern Hill. She wanted her father to know him, and this would open the way without effort. She left the city behind her with relief, and a reaching out in spirit to the days ahead of her, days already full of enchantment and thrilling promise. She made no attempt to conceal from herself her love for Pedro Girard. Every meeting intensified it, just as every glance from his eyes made her aware of the inevitable moment when they would find each other's love a reality. Almost she dreaded this, the rending of the veil between them, the outpouring from his own lips of all she was to him. They had known each other only a few days, and she felt, beside the enthralling glamour of love, a surrender of the whole attitude she had assumed toward romance with Michel Savonich. He had told her she would discover she was not cold nor unresponsive; that the hour of self-knowledge would come when she knew the fire within her own heart; that then she would welcome love.

The memory of him came often to her as a recurrent dread. He would

reach New York around the first week in April, she had assumed, from the date of his sailing. It was partly to escape his finding out where she was living at the Warwick that she hurried the departure to Long Island. He would make some excuse to see her, she did not doubt, and she put off the moment as far as possible.

She found the Welling estate at Lantern Hill immeasurably more beautiful than she had expected. Turning off the main shore road, the car followed a private road through the woods for several miles, dipped deeply into a gully and rose again to the top of Lantern Hill overlooking the open Sound. Behind on either side stretched long, irregular inlet bays cutting into the short line of the island. The lighthouse was erected at the end of a long, sheltering breakwater down on the beach. It looked absurdly small and toylike from the house itself, built at the edge of the hilltop, with sloping Italian gardens down to the very edge of the shifting sand dunes.

"They named this in the days of the Sound pirates, I believe," Marcia told her when they had rambled over the gardens and stables. "They used to put a false beacon up here, and lure ships on the rocks below. Probably some of our most respected citizens are descended from the ones who thought it up. It is your father's favorite playground. He goes in for motor-boat racing, horse-show exhibits. I think he even had a flying boat last year out here, but he took it South with him. You surely have inherited his love of sports and outdoor life, Bab."

"Oh, I do love it!" Bab exclaimed. "And have you seen Dandolo? He's acting perfectly wild to be free again. Just look behind you at that beautiful pasture land sloping down from the polo field. Isn't it gorgeous?"

She paused suddenly, a thought of Sonya Zhibel occurring to her. Would

she love this sort of life? Would she even fit into the setting, or be like some rare, exotic flower transplanted to the open fields. She had not heard anything more from her father concerning Sonya. He called up every day during the following week, and she thought he seemed happier and more relaxed. He promised to see them on Sunday and give her her first lessons with the high-powered motor boat; asked how she liked her horse, a slender-legged, chestnut thoroughbred he had picked out for her.

"He's a beauty, dad. I named him Romany Rye. Fearfully romantic, isn't it? Yes, I know"—at the protest over the wire—"he's registered something else, but I liked this better."

After she had hung up the receiver, she sat back in her chair, musing, wishing he had said something about Sonya. The miniature had attracted Marcia's attention at dinner when she had happened to wear it with the long chain.

"It's like the Tuscan women, isn't it? Or was it the Florentines who had blond hair and black eyes with that creamy, rich-toned skin?" She leaned over Marcia's shoulder. "But she's Spanish and Roumanian, you said, didn't you?"

Marcia studied the miniature in puzzled contemplation. The face was startlingly familiar to her, yet she could not place it.

"Of course, it was painted fifteen years ago or more, but it is a portrait of Madame Zhibel. She gave it to me herself. You know, she fascinates me, Mrs. Lord. She seems so richly wise in woman understanding, as if she had been purified through fire like rare metals. She is just that: rare. I love it." She had crossed to the space above the low bookcase and hung the medallion by its thin gold chain against the dove-gray wall. The face seemed to glow like a revealed jewel. "Hang there," she had said with conviction. "It is

your place, since you are beloved by him."

"You're the strangest girl, Bab," Marcia had said curiously, "not to be at all jealous of this woman in your father's life just when you had discovered him for yourself."

"Life is jammed with compensation," Barbara laughed. "Pedro's coming out to-morrow. He called up to tell me. Will you please have convenient headaches while he is here, so you cannot possibly go out with us?"

"Bab," Marcia began, puzzled over her own duty to the girl, "if you only knew——"

"But I do," said Barbara calmly. "He's told me everything. We don't mind. We're living to-day, you know."

With that first visit of Pedro had come a gladness, a relaxed communion of spirit between them in their new-found companionship that each gave way to with utter thankfulness. He visited Lantern Hill several times during the week. The sunset hour became a magic trysting time for both. Barbara would meet him herself in her car, and there would be the long drive back through springtime woods, the greeting from Marcia, and then an hour together, sometimes riding through the adjacent roads or driving in the car. Welling had met him over the first week-end, and had liked him, but in his own preoccupation had failed to realize the situation.

"I feel horribly responsible and guilty," Marcia said with placid concern. "When I started to explain your father merely remarked that he liked Pedro and was glad you were friends."

"Well, dear, he's always trusted to Providence to bring me up," laughed Barbara. "It's a little late for him to show any personal responsibility, isn't it? I'm thankful they even approve of each other."

After her first week away from town she felt a relaxation and sense of

security. No word had come from Savonich, if he had arrived from Italy. There was an absorbing unreality to the passing hours, she found. The days slipped by unnoted, except when Pedro came to see her. But she observed a peculiar reticence in his manner now when she questioned him about any danger to himself. He would laugh and turn the conversation in another channel, avoiding any reference to the problem he had discussed freely with her in the Park. Once when they were returning from a long beach stroll after sunset he had lost his grip on himself for the moment in an unexpected denunciation of the circumstances that seemed to throw a net about him. There was no show of sentiment, no outburst of love toward her; rather an austere relinquishment on his part of any right to happiness.

"A man with his foot on the scaffold stair does not sign contracts," he said bitterly. "You know that I love you, just as I would swear before God that you love me. We do not have to tell this to each other. We know the truth, but what help is it to us? I have tried to force Bibet to give me names, to tell me how I can face my enemies and have a chance to fight. He declaims a lot of picturesque, royalist rot at me, and tells me to go away and hide in South America."

Barbara walked beside him, her face dreamy with thoughts of all that might be before them both.

"I'd love to see South America," she said contentedly.

"You beloved darling." He turned his face to her with eager gratefulness. "I believe you would go with me into exile without a regret. But I'm not going to run away. Somehow I feel as if I may be given a chance. If I could get at them—tangibly, you know! But to feel this unseen shadow creeping behind every step you take, to feel that somebody is waiting for a happy mo-

ment to stick a knife into your back, or push you by accident under a train—well, it's irritating."

He had lighted a cigarette, and strolled beside her, his eyes half closed, lips compressed not in bitterness, rather in a challenging resentment of the unseen forces opposing him. Barbara's mind failed to grasp the idea of immediate danger. After all, she thought, it was the present moment that counted, the one which was theirs then. He had said that he loved her, but in no thrillingly romantic fashion. Words that she had longed to hear him say had come from his lips as perfunctorily as if he had spoken of Dandolo or the lighthouse. The strange air of reserve which he assumed at times, of aloofness and authority, always aroused her temper. He had spoken as casually, as confidently of her love for him as if they had been declared lovers for months. Nor did he make the least attempt at demonstrative love. It puzzled her, amused her, too, as she regained her sense of humor in a flash, and forgave him. He was not like other men. Love was a consecration of the object desired, not mere possession. He gave her his highest faith, yet would not ask her to be his wife while his own life hung in jeopardy.

Her thoughts reverted to the night at the Villa Floresca, of Savonich kneeling before her, of the touch of his large, white hands that made her shudder. How different the two men were, she thought uneasily. Almost she felt impelled to tell Pedro about the message she had received, of her dread that Savonich might find her. But the tangle of his own affairs so possessed him that she could not trouble him with so vague an annoyance. Why should she fear the violinist, she asked herself after Pedro had gone that day? She had no reason. He had never threatened her. It was merely her own intuitive sense of caution that had always warned her.

The night was warm, even for the first of May. Marcia had retired early, at ten-thirty, but a spirit of restless moodiness possessed Barbara. Her windows opened widely to the sea view, and the break of low waves along the curving shore held a haunting charm in the moonless night. She had shut off the lights in her room, and lay upon the low couch by the windows, her arms folded beneath her head, marveling at Pedro's self-control. Why could he not claim her love, seize the hour of life that was theirs, and marry even though he were overtaken by this shadowing horror of assassination? She remembered an Indian poem she had read somewhere of a youth led in the dawn light to execution. He had met a girl whose eyes answered the call in his own, and had asked her love as life's last boon. There was a tragic, transcendent glory in that final hour of cheating fate that had thrilled her imagination as she had read it. Why should Pedro feel that a woman was to be shielded even from the courage of her love? She hated him for the moment, realizing the deadlock his relinquishment of her placed between them.

Suddenly she was aware of a peculiar, intuitive sense of danger, of mental oppression and uneasiness. She rose from the couch, listening. Dandolo, too, had risen, moving stealthily toward the stone balcony outside the windows, his ears pointed suspiciously, growling ominously.

She did not call the dog or rebuke him, but at that instant she knew that Savonich was near. And with the knowledge there came a great fear, not for herself but of imminent danger to Pedro, although she knew of no connection between the two. She stepped to the side of the long window, hidden by the fall of silken drapery, and listened tensely. There was a stone stairway in the Italian style that led from her balcony directly down into the gar-

den. At the head of this she could see the figure of the dog on guard. From the garden below, faintly, hardly distinguishable at first from the breaking waves along the shore, there came the music of a violin playing the haunting, threatening strains of the "Salutation to the Night."

CHAPTER IX.

Her first thought was to arouse Marcia Lord; anything rather than the necessity of facing Savonich alone. It was like him to come like this, she thought indignantly, spectacular always in his methods. And with the flare of anger came confidence. She had never feared him. Why should she feel repugnance and dread now? Throwing a long hostess gown about her, she belted its dull-green velvet folds with a girdle of silver, and went quickly from her own room, whistling Dandolo back to her. It was not late by the clock in the lower hall; ten-fifteen only. Some of the servants were still up in the house. The lights of the lower hall were turned on, and in the living room also. She crossed to the doors that opened on the terrace, and opened them wide, admitting the nearer sound of the music. There was no fear in voice or manner as she stepped out, Dandolo growling beside her. She glanced over the garden below, the wide terraces dipping to the shore, the masses of shrubbery, and fountains gleaming in the half light.

"Michel," she called imperiously, "will you kindly stop serenading me and come here?"

The music continued, but nearer now. She saw him step leisurely along the walk, a huge, misshapen shadow in the darkness. It occurred to her again, how gnomelike he was in outline, his head and shoulders too large for the rest of his body. As he reached the terrace he ceased playing abruptly, and came to greet her with a laugh.

3—Ains.

"I am a great lover," he said mildly, as he took her hand, "of the unexpected. It makes me happy to create my own atmosphere; romance is so rare a thing. You do not mind?"

"Certainly I mind. So does Dandolo. Lucky for you I recognized your entrance music," she said carelessly. "Come into the living room and tell me how my mother is, and why you arrive to pay a call at this time of night. Mrs. Lord is staying here with me. How did you find out where I was?"

He followed her into the spacious living room that crossed the seaward side of the house, his eyes filled with a restrained, rapacious longing as they watched the slim, velvet-clad figure.

"From your mother. She wished me to see you, and give you a message. Are you happy here?"

She switched on the light in the tall, gold-shaded lamp at the end of the couch, and took for herself the chair opposite.

"Very. What is the message?"

"So uncompromising, ungracious, when I have made the great effort to come out here, lost my way, rambled a thousand miles in the dark, and finally discovered your castle!"

"If you had telephoned me first, I would have sent a car to meet you at the station."

"I did not come by land," he smiled back at her, tapping the end of a cigarette on the back of his hand before lighting it. "I am the master of occasion, you see, so I must travel uniquely to cover all my engagements, as it were. No, I will not be mysterious with you because you have no humor. You only are disgusted, as if a huge bear tumbled to amuse you. I have been staying with friends down the shore from here near Bayside. I came by motor boat from there." He paused to look searchingly at her half-averted face. "You are even more beautiful than when I saw you last. Look at me."

Startled at the change in his tone, she obeyed. He came nearer, staring intently at her.

"Ah, my woman of fire, who has wakened you? Don't move. Your eyes betray you to me; the very tones of your voice are different, enriched, confident, triumphant."

She held her self-control with difficulty.

"Tell me what my mother said."

Shrugging his shoulders, he seated himself on the velvet couch with the cumbersome enjoyment of an animal in its luxury.

"She received your letter concerning Madame Zhibel. Your wild enthusiasm over the lady irritated Auriol, naturally. She desired me to place the private life of Sonya before you, that you do not permit your admiration to overrule your good taste!"

"How dare you speak of Madame Zhibel, the woman my father is going to marry, in such a tone!" Barbara's voice rang with quick resentment. "My mother is jealous. She would do anything to hurt them both. I wouldn't believe anything she said."

"No? Then perhaps you believe this." He took from an inner pocket of his coat a leather case, removed from it a folded letter, and handed the small, heavy, cream sheet to her. "Read it."

She glanced at the brief message reluctantly.

MY DEAR SAVONICH: I beg that you come to me at once. I must see you. There comes a supreme moment in life when love alone is vital. I have news of the greatest importance to tell you.

SONYA ZHIBEL.

She read it twice over in silence, dazed to discover any connection between the man whom she despised and the woman her father loved and trusted. Suspicion against Sonya flooded her mind. She recalled what Welling had told her, of the sudden breaking of the engagement, of Sonya swearing it was

not because of his daughter. Before she could speak Savonich spoke quietly, taking the letter from her hand and replacing it in the wallet.

"You force me to show you this as proof of what I say. I have known Sonya Zhibel very nearly all my life, as a boy and man. She is over forty years old now. Twenty-five years ago she was the most beautiful actress in southern Europe. She had kings, emperors begging for her favor, and she refused them all but one. At twenty she ran away to Paris with Prince Charles Alexis on the very eve of his marriage to the Archduchess Anne Celeste of Austria. He had just been called to rule Thalassa, and secret pressure by his many royal relatives among the powers pulled him back to his throne away from her. He married Anne Celeste, but returned to Sonya, braving everything for her love. She gave up her career and lived in the south of France until the outbreak of the war. This is the truth. You can easily verify what I tell you. She was known as the prince's morganatic wife, and her salon was a rendezvous for the riffraff of European courts."

Barbara listened in amazement, the sickening horror of all he told striking home to her with a pitiful certainty. Her memory of Sonya's own words to her came back; Pedro's story, too, of his father. If this were true, if Savonich spoke the truth, this woman had taken the place of the dead princess, his mother. She shut her eyes, striving for composure, determined not to show Savonich how bitterly he had hurt her. After all, she told herself, he knew nothing of Pedro; he could not know how vitally this news of Sonya's past affected her own love. She rose from her seat, resourceful and steady nerved.

"Well, that is quite all, is it not? You have told me what you were sent to tell? I shall not tell my father one

word of this. Madame Zhibel is a very charming and beautiful woman. I think he is very fortunate to have won her love and regard."

She forced herself to say it for the sake of Welling. Whatever she might think herself, she would not give Savonich any satisfaction. He gazed at her broodingly, his head lowered.

"No, not all. You remember I told you that last night that for you and myself somewhere beyond us there lay the hour of fate. I told you our saying from my country, 'the hour waits.' I am here. I hate and worship you in one breath. I could kill you with my bare hands, strangle you about your soft throat for your contempt of me. In my land when a woman we fancy hates us we kill her. We do not leave her for some one whom she may love. You understand?"

As he took a step nearer, Dandolo gave a warning snarl. She slipped her hand through his collar, restraining him quietly.

"You had better go. You know perfectly well, Michel, that I have never been afraid of you. I'm not now."

"And you think for one moment that I will give you up because you order me away like a servant?" He laughed back at her. With the strained, swelling veins on his forehead, the deepening of color in his heavy face there came also a vivid likeness to the Tartar, the cruel, down-turned lips, narrowed eyes, and broad nostrils dilated. Her thoughts raced toward escape, evasion. She could call the servants, she assured herself. Marcia Lord, too, was near by. It was impossible that Savonich had the power to harm her.

The telephone bell rang at the stand behind her. She almost stumbled as she turned to answer it. The voice was strange, a man's voice broken with emotion. She did not recognize it for the moment until his words connected him with Pedro.

"Miss Welling, this is Bibet. You know me, Antoine Bibet; I met you at Madame Zhibel's, you remember?"

Her back was toward Savonich. He waited for her with assured composure, smoking steadily.

"Yes," she answered softly. "What is it?"

"Listen to me, and be strong. Pedro was picked up in the East River by the harbor police. He is in Bellevue Hospital, injured badly but not fatally. I have private information that the head of the band of conspirators who have tried to kill him is on his way to do you harm. Pedro told me this himself when he regained consciousness."

"He is here now. Will you call the police for me or send help?" She said the words in a lowered, conversational tone, her hand clenched on Dandolo's collar.

As she hung up the receiver, Savonich dashed the cigarette to the floor and turned on her, his teeth bared against strained lips. Before he could reach her, she had let go of the dog with a quick command. He sprang at the Russian's throat silently, lithe and deadly as a tiger in his aim. As Savonich tore with ripping fingers at the dog, she slipped by him to give the alarm to the servants, calling for help. Every impulse for mercy had died in her heart. She felt savage in her hate toward this man who had tried to kill Pedro, to ruin her own life, to spread wretchedness and disillusion wherever the poison of his malevolence had penetrated.

Roused from early sleep, Marcia heard the disturbance below, threw a dressing gown about her, and hurried to the upper landing, calling Barbara's name. As she came down the staircase, old Janeway, the butler, rushed past her into the living room with a gleaming revolver in his hand. Behind him came the other servants: Hanson, the big Norwegian chauffeur, the Polish gar-

dener, and two assistants, half dressed. She followed them hesitatingly to the doors of the living room and came suddenly upon a tableau of horror.

The senseless, mangled form of Savonich lay outstretched upon the Turkish rug under the amber lamplight. Barbara knelt beside him, her hands dragging at Dandolo's collar to get him away from his quarry, her eyes brilliant, teeth clenched on her colorless lips.

"There he is!" she exclaimed. "Hold him fast, Janeway. He won't hurt you, but keep him here in this room until I get back. The police will be here for him. Hanson, bring around a car. I'm going to New York. Quick!"

She stood up, her finger tips pressed to her temples, staring down at the bloodstained face on the rug, and suddenly the deep sobs broke with laughter from her white lips.

"Damn you!" she said. "You would kill him, would you? You kill and rob and ravage as you please!" Out of the days at the Villa Floresca there came back to her Colonel Pitou's accusation. "Kalmuck," she breathed over the prone figure. "Kalmuck, barbarian. Dandolo, watch!"

"Where are you going, Barbara?" Marcia stopped her with eager tenderness. "Tell me what has happened."

"Nothing," Barbara sobbed back bitterly, deep, dry sobs that hurt. "That man's a murderer. The police are coming after him. I'm going to Pedro. They tried to kill him to-night—after he left me. Don't let that man Savonich escape alive. If he tries to get away, let Dandolo loose. Don't stop me, please."

"Dear, I'm going with you," Marcia said quietly. "Do you think I would let you face this alone?"

Ten minutes later, dressed for the long drive into town, Barbara halted for one moment at the doors of the living room. The menservants sat as

she had left them, staring, waiting for any move from the man who lay on the floor. Janeway nodded to her confidently, but it was Dandolo she looked at with a great thankfulness, and the hound seemed to understand her.

"Watch, Dandolo," she ordered. "Kill him if he tries to get away."

Dandolo whined restlessly, and lay watching fixedly the face on the rug as she hurried out of the house into the waiting car.

CHAPTER X.

It seemed years, the long motor ride back to the city, over Queensboro Bridge, and down the East Side to Twenty-sixth Street where Bellevue faced the water front. They were detained a moment at the entrance under the red-brick archway; then the wait in the reception room while inquiry was being made; and finally the long, circuitous route to the room where he lay off the emergency ward.

When the door opened, Barbara fully expected Bibet to greet them. Instead she saw only with terrible distinctness the motionless figure in the narrow bed, the deathlike face of Pedro on the pillow, his head strained back, breathing heavily. A nurse moved quietly about the room, but it was the woman kneeling by the bed, her arms flung out as if in protection over the boy lying there, that Barbara saw. It was Sonya Zhibel. She stopped at the door, hesitant and hurt. Was it not enough, she thought bitterly, that Sonya should come between her father and herself? Must she claim entrance even here!

"Where is Bibet, Count de Martigny?" she asked. "He called me up and asked me to come here."

Sonya rose from the bedside, her face as white as the one on the pillow, her arms outstretched to the girl.

"Come here," she said brokenly. "Do not hate me. I, too, have the right of

love beside him in this hour. Bibet sent for me. He has gone with the police to capture Savonich at Lantern Hill. I waited for you. See if Pedro will rouse if you call him. He will not answer me."

Barbara went quickly to the bed, slipped off her cloak and hat and, regardless of any one else in the room, she slipped her arm beneath Pedro's head and drew it to rest on her breast.

"Dear," she whispered, "can you hear me? Pedro, listen. It is Barbara. Show me that you hear me! Dearest, answer me, Pedro, Pedro!"

Smoothing back his damp hair, she pressed her lips to his forehead, her cheek close against his cold face, calling to him softly. He had refused to claim her love that last visit along the shore, even when he knew she was all his. He had made no attempt to kiss or caress her, but now, with his unconscious head lying back on her shoulder, she lavished on him every endearment and word of love as if she half feared death might rob her of the opportunity. The nurse left the room. Marcia, unable to control her emotion at the pitiful sight, followed her. Only Sonya stood by the closed door, her face lifted as if in silent prayer.

Suddenly giving up hope, Barbara bowed her head over him, sobbing brokenly, her tears falling on his face, holding him close in her arms.

"Look there; he stirred!" Sonya whispered. "It is the first time in hours. Oh, my beloved, my boy, it is my punishment."

She knelt by the bed, her beautiful face drawn and haggard with suspense, but Barbara never noticed her. All her thoughts were for the man she held in her arms, striving to draw him back to consciousness out of the drifting gray of dreamless sleep. He was hers, she told herself fiercely. They had loved each other passionately, yet never had he even laid his hand on her in love.

She lifted her head to watch for the faintest sign of recognition, fighting with all the strength of her mind and soul against the shock that held him bound.

"Pedro," she called again, sharply this time, imperiously. "You must fight yourself, do you hear? Fight against it, Pedro; fight, I tell you." The last came from between her clenched teeth as she strove to keep back the tears. And suddenly she bent her head until her lips were pressed close to his own, not with tenderness but with a quick desperation that hurt. Widely his eyelids opened to stare upward at her, the eyes misty still, without recognition. She laughed down at him triumphantly as she saw them, the nerve tension drawn to the danger limit. "Dear, look at me! It's Barbara, Pedro; I love you! I won't let you go, do you hear? I won't!" Her head drooped over him again, and their lips met in a long, close kiss.

Sonya rose noiselessly, gazed back at the two figures yearningly, and slipped from the room.

"They will bring Savonich here first to have Pedro identify him," Sonya told her later, as they waited in the reception room for the return of Bibet. "I begged them to let me take him to my own home; Pedro, I mean. It is frightful that he could be here in this hospital of the people——"

"I think it is exactly what he would like," Barbara said musingly. "He is deliciously democratic. Old Mother Bellevue they call it, the nurse told me. How long Bibet is! We made the trip in about three quarters of an hour. He should be here now. Savonich was helpless when I left him."

"Why should he go way out there to harm you?" Sonya exclaimed. "Because you were loved by Pedro, and he would strike at him through you? No, not that, for he had already seen Pedro

struck down and thrown into the river. Bibet told you how it happened?"

"There was no time over the wire. He only said he was hurt."

"Oh, and there is so much more to tell. It is horrible. Again and again they have tried to kill him, always secretly so nothing could be traced direct to any one. Always it must appear accidental, you see. Then comes Michel Savonich from Europe with final orders, and to-night the attempt on Pedro's life was made as he came from your house on Long Island."

"But he left about six!" exclaimed Barbara.

"And his body was picked up in the East River at nine," continued Sonya, "by the harbor police, who heard his cries for help before he lost consciousness. They believe he was taken out in a motor boat after being drugged, and was thrown overboard at some point below the Fifty-ninth Street bridge."

"Savonich told me that he made the trip up the Sound to Lantern Hill by motor boat; that he was staying with friends in Bayside."

"He lies, but, if he told half a truth, then Bibet may discover the whole plot, if the boat should be found there. Why should Michel go straight there after he thought they had successfully done away with Pedro?" The familiarity with his name, the dreamy conjecture of her tone roused Barbara's anger. She turned to her coldly, determined to compel at least frankness, instead of an assumed veil of mystery.

"He came because he had a message from my mother. I knew him in Italy, where he was a musical protégé of my stepfather, Czarny. He has always annoyed me with his advances, and when I objected to-night to the statements he made about you——"

"About me?" Sonya's delicate, dark eyebrows arched in surprise. "He would dare go to you——"

"What does it matter, after all?" Barbara said slowly, wearily. "I know exactly the type of man he is. We live for to-day, not the past. I would never tell my father. Only why should you come here to-night?"

"Why?" Sonya's wide, dark eyes softened with infinite tenderness. "Because it is my privilege to be here now. I am Pedro's mother. Only Bibet knew. I told Savonich when I sent for him to come to me, thinking I could save Pedro. I did this on my own responsibility, against Bibet's advice, because I know that love is all, that Pedro himself would relinquish every claim to Thalassa without a regret rather than give you up. I told Savonich the truth, and he gave me his solemn word of honor that he accepted my proofs, and would present them to the central committee so that no further attempt against the life of Pedro would be made. Yet to-night he tries to kill him. My dear, I know men, and I know that they place their own passions before every other consideration in this world. You tell me that Savonich loved you. Then I say the reason why he broke his oath to me, and let the plot go on to kill my boy, was because he knew of your love and meant to remove him forever."

"Wait; there is Bibet." Barbara started up as she recognized the massive, dignified figure entering the corridor. He was alone and greeted them with a peculiar air of restrained triumph.

"Savonich is dead," he said briefly. "I saw it happen and thank God for it. He tried to escape after we had him outside in the automobile. He made a break toward the shore. Between the hound and the police he met his end. They have the motor boat which lay at the landing place, and full evidence found on his body connecting him with the attempted murder of Pedro. How is the boy?"

"He is out of danger now," Barbara

said, flushing slightly. "I wish he could be taken out home with me."

"Don't take him away from me yet," Sonya pleaded. "Do you know that I have never caressed him since they took him from my arms after his birth; never until to-night. Ah, Bibet, you frown and hate me for telling, don't you, but I do not mind."

"I am not thinking of you, madame," Bibet replied with composure. "I am thinking who will tell this boy when he is able to stand the truth?"

"You think he will mind?" Sonya laughed softly, shaking her lovely head. "I will tell him myself, do you hear, Bibet? I am not afraid. We will take him from here to my house, and you, Barbara, shall stay there, if you like, with him. Am I not right?"

Barbara made her decision quickly, smiling over at Marcia Lord.

"Will you tell father, please, where I am, Mrs. Lord?" she asked. "Tell him I want him to come to Madame Zhibel's in the morning."

Yet it was several days before the final dénouement came in the lifelong romance of Sonya Zhibel. Pedro was removed to the house on West Twelfth Street the following day, but remained too weak to be told. Constantly he demanded Barbara beside him, holding to the surety of her love as if it were his one great anchor on life. And Sonya, lingering about him, gave way to the supreme right of the girl to be nearest to him. Once his glance followed the stately, lovely figure from the room with a puzzled admiration.

"How beautiful she is," he said, "Why am I here, Barbara? Will we be married as soon as I can leave?"

But there came a twilight hour when he was able to walk about. Barbara had left him alone while she spoke with her father downstairs in the library. They went up together later, and started to enter Sonya's own little music room

on the second floor to find her. She sat in the deep, winged armchair, her hands resting on Pedro's head as he knelt beside her, his face buried on her lap.

"No, no, do not leave us," she called softly, her voice calm and compassionate. "I have told him everything, and behold, he has found his mother's love. Stay with us, Paul; I wish you to hear it also, that you may understand why I had to give you up, my beloved one."

She told it with a grave dignity, her romance with Prince Charles Alexis, Pedro's father. There had been a morganatic marriage between them, the rite both under the civil law in France and the Greek church also, the very closest bond of love and faith between them in those first glad days. Then had come the powerful political demand for an alliance with Austria, and his marriage with the Archduchess Anne Celeste. She had understood perfectly, Sonya said, and had desired to enter the church herself. After the wedding ceremony, she had drawn into seclusion at the castle retreat near the convent of St. Sophia.

"The rest is hard to tell, my Pedro," Sonya concluded, as she stroked the close-curved blond hair at her knee. "In these days of sanity and clarity of vision, it is hard to look back and comprehend the old intrigues, the exigencies when desperation drove one to do anything to retain a hold on thrones and power. Charles planned with the help of the Count de Martigny to make you his legal heir apparent from the hour of your birth. Anne Celeste had been stricken with a mysterious malady. Antoine's wife, the Countess Melanie, was her most trusted lady-in-waiting. I made the journey secretly from La Touraine to Escholtz, in upper Hungary, where Bibet met me, two weeks before you were born. From there we made the journey by night, and I was hidden by the countess at a cottage near the

castle. Anne Celeste died, but the report was given out officially that she had died in childbirth. Bibet carried the plot through perfectly. The physician who attended us both had been brought from the Martigny estate in France, and sworn to secrecy. You were taken from me to the capital when you were a few weeks old, the heir to the throne of Thalassa, and in direct line of succession to the throne of Austria. Ah, it is all blown away now, thrones, crowns, pretensions. And you cannot know the heartache and tragedy that I lived through for years to please him whom I loved, and place his son on the throne. And you, Pedro, you do not hate me? You do not care that you lose a possible crown some day?"

Pedro rose to his feet, his face aglow with happiness as he reached for Barbara, to draw her close to him.

"I live for to-day, my beautiful mother," he laughed. "Barbara, I haven't any idea what name I may have a right to, but will you marry me anyway?"

Sonya sprang to her feet, horrified and indignant at his daring to treat the subject as a jest.

"Pedro," she cried with authority, "beloved son, you are fully named, christened, registered, everything that you should be. In France a marriage is legal under the civil law, and they do not recognize the morganatic reversal. You are Peter Alexis Ghirardus. It is your father's family name from the Middle Ages. Pedro we called you when you are tiny, for a love name. When he would come to see me, then I would beg him to tell me everything about you, the smallest detail, how you looked and grew, and if your nurses were tender with you; every little tiny thing you did as you grew older. So, you see, you are Peter Girard."

"Then bless us, and forgive me,"

Pedro said whimsically, kissing her. "Mr. Welling has already, haven't you, sir?"

Welling stood in the half light of the long, curtained windows, smoking quietly, watching Sonya.

"Long ago," he remarked.

There was silence in the room after Barbara had led her patient downstairs for dinner. Sonya stood as they had left her, her hands lifted to clasp behind her head, her lashes sparkling with sudden tears. Welling came and stood before her.

"I wish I could tell you how I kneel before you in spirit, Sonya," he said slowly. "You have lived your love through great sacrifice and unselfishness, while I have only just discovered my fatherhood."

She gave him her outstretched hands gratefully, but drew away when he tried to embrace her.

"No, my Paul, be content a little while. We have our own beautiful dream, have we not? For the present let that suffice. You may laugh, but I am like a dead moon. The sun has gone from me; I reflect no more light."

He pressed his lips to her soft, yielding hands.

"I am content to wait," he said.

Downstairs Pedro and Barbara amused themselves watching Dandolo and the black Chow, Li Foo, get acquainted.

"I wonder why they don't come down," Barbara said at last. "Dinner is served."

Pedro's arms closed about her, drawing her head back to his shoulder.

"Which would you rather be," he asked boyishly, teasingly, "almost a princess, or always a queen?"

Dandolo looked up at the two silent figures, waited, whined restlessly, and finally yawned and strolled into the dining room, impatient with lovers.